DVD ROM GIANT DEMO DVD INSIDE

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

PLUS: FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 · ARENA FOOTBALL · AND 5 MORE!

OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation MAGAZINE

1UP.COM

Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine Issue 104 (May 2006)

NEW GAMES! NEW LIFE!

KILLZONE: LIBERATION

TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

+ 17 MORE

+ WHAT DROUGHT? 22 PSP AND PS2 GAMES REVIEWED

PS3

LAUNCH DATE AND ONLINE PLAN REVEALED!

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ISSUE 104 MAY
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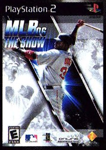

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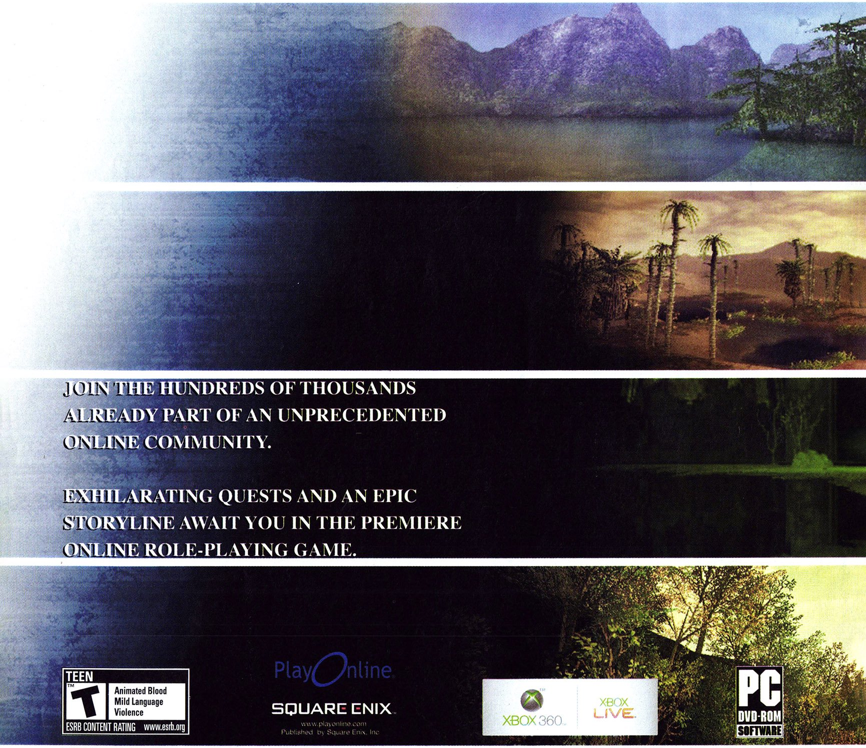
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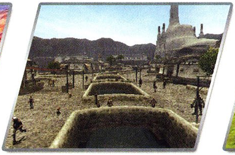

DURING THE CRYSTAL WAR, THE NATIONS OF VANA'DIEL BANDED TOGETHER TO AVERT THE THREAT OF ADVANCING BEASTMAN HORDES. NOW, TWENTY YEARS LATER, NEW EVILS THREATEN PEACE IN VANA'DIEL.

ADVENTURERS FROM THE FURTHEST REACHES OF THE GLOBE HAVE BEEN CALLED TO DEFEND THEIR WORLD.

#104

GIANT DEMO DVD INSIDE

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

OFFICIAL U.S. PlayStation

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GAZINE

PSP

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TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

+ 17 MORE

WHAT DROUGHT?

22 PSP AND PS2 GAMES REVIEWED

PS3

LAUNCH DATE AND ONLINE PLAN REVEALED!

COVER STORY

PSPARTY

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"PEOPLE WERE RAVING ABOUT HOW GREAT THE PSP WAS."

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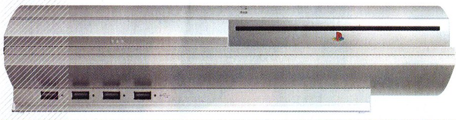

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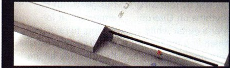

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Welcome back, Lara—we've missed you.

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Missed opportunities.

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After months of speculation, we finally—*finally*—have some cold, hard facts about the PlayStation 3. You can find out all about the release date and online information on page 36, but for the very latest information, your best bet is always www.1UP.com.

We're also getting closer and closer to this year's E3, which means that game publishers are starting to share their secrets about what they have planned for the upcoming year. Sony, Activision, Ubisoft, and Sega are just a few of the companies that will be showing their games, so stop by opm.1UP.com to find out all the latest news on the titles you're eagerly anticipating.

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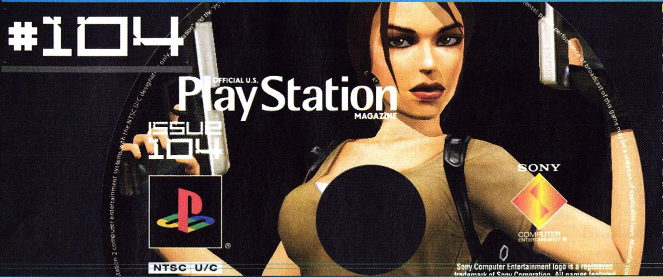


TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Gaming's most famous heroine returns, and you have the chance to try out the new adventures of Ms. Croft in this exclusive PS2 demo showcasing some of the cool new features from the full game. The "new and improved" Lara can perform rolls and somersaults to evade enemy fire or use the environments around her to take out enemies by shooting at objects that may explode or topple over. Try it for yourself!

ON THE DVD

LEGENDS ARE MADE, NOT BORN

WELCOME TO OUR WORLD

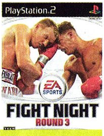
One of the things we pride ourselves on is bringing you the latest and greatest demos the gaming world has to offer. That is one of the benefits of reading the *Official U.S. PlayStation Magazine*, which you are holding right here in your hands.

This month sees the return of the amazing legend Lara Croft as she plunges deep into old territory. Will she sink or swim? You decide in this month's demo. You can also take *Fight Night Round 3* for a run around the ring, or try *Arena Football* for a mix of sim- and arcade-style football.

After that, read up on musical games in the Replay section, then sample some of the classics we included on the disc just for you, including the ultrarare and completely addicting *Rez*.

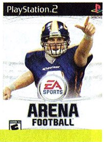
So, what are you waiting for? Grab the disc and get to your PlayStation 2!

PLAY IT!



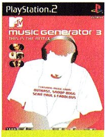
FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3

Load up on the latest in the *Fight Night* series with this demo, and see how *Round 3* delivers the same solid gameplay.



ARENA FOOTBALL

If simulation football games are too time consuming and arcade games are too easy, then try the mix of both found in *Arena Football*.



MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 3

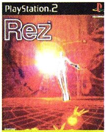
Try your hand at being a virtual DJ and create your own music masterpiece or remix songs from Carl Cox or Snoop.

AMPLITUDE

Unleash your inner rhythm as you navigate through various skill levels. Sample one of the arenas in this demo, complete with music videos.

GITAROO MAN

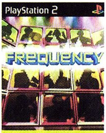
Put your agility to the test by following rhythms on *Gitaroo Man*'s guitar while defending the planet with good old-fashioned rock 'n' roll.



REZ

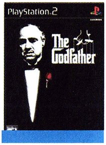
In case you missed this gem with an amazing cult following, here is the demo so you can see exactly what all the hype was about!

WATCH IT!



FREQUENCY

The music industry's top recording artists are relying on you to remix their tunes, and that's just what you're going to do for them.

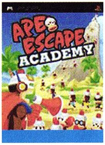


THE GODFATHER

That's right, kids—it's time for mob hits, bank heists, and extortion. See if you have what it takes to become the next and most powerful Don.

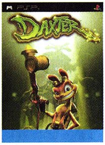
HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

The latest installment in the *Hitman* series looks promising. Check out this trailer about the world's greatest assassin.



APE ESCAPE ACADEMY

Go behind the scenes of Specter's *Ape Escape Academy*, overflowing with frantic fun and wacky humor.



DAXTER

The star of this game is a legend in his own fuzzy mind. Here you can check in with the masterminds behind this full-sized platformer.

BAND TOGETHER EVENT

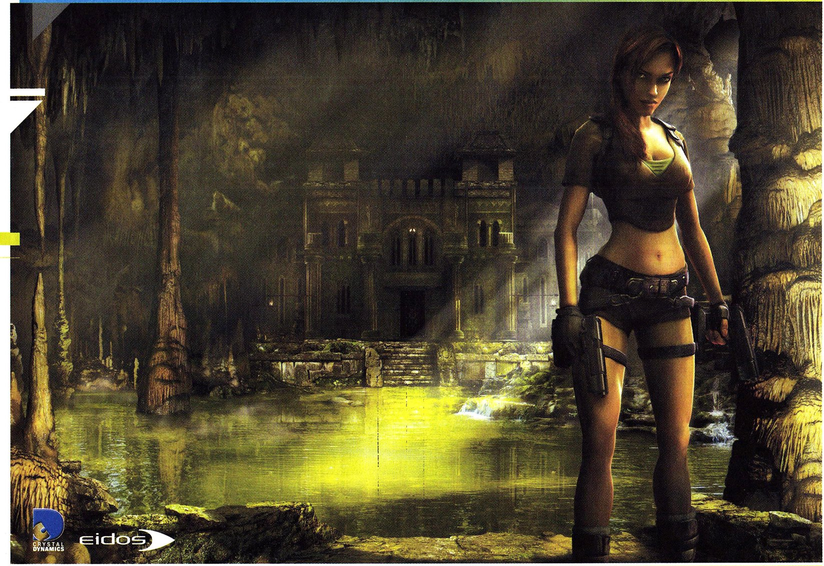
See what it is like to be a member of the Game Advisory Panel and go behind the scenes of the recent Band Together event.

PlayStation

#104

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

SOME CURVES CAN BE DANGEROUS



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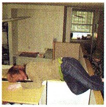
STAFF

THE OPM FAMILY

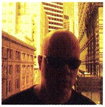
TOM BYRON

can't get over the reaction to his debut on *The 1UP Show* (Episode 17, March 3): "Wow, *The Darkness* sounds cool" and "What a messy office" served as proof that people watched and noticed. Riding his star-bound momentum, Tom's already talking spin-off, with a biopic also in the works. In the meantime, he'll keep playing *Field Commander*, his latest "greatest game ever," and wants to assure his fans he'll never, ever clean his office because he wants to stay true to who he is as an artist and as a person.



DANA JONGEWAARD

thought that if it was that much fun to crawl across ledges and jump from wall to wall in a videogame, then how much more fun would it be to do it in real life? The answer she finally came up with: not much fun at all.



JOE RYBICKI

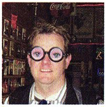
can no longer see. He had been sitting for hours in a darkened room in a futile attempt to figure out what the hell was going on in *Splinter Cell Essentials*, and someone turned on the lights. The sudden blaze of fluorescence rendered him blind.

THIERRY NGUYEN

is jealous of his baby's easy life—sitting around, having people attend to your every need, like hunger and intestinal movement. If Scooter could regress to such an idyllic existence, he'd spend his time eating Krispy Kreme burgers.

GIANCARLO VARANINI

is ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ ZZZZZZZZZZ......huh? Wha? Hrm...zzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz...zzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz zzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzzz....

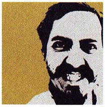


LOGAN PARR

dreamed he was playing a revamped version of *FFVII* on a gold PS3 autographed by Cloud Strife, Sophie Tucker, and Elton John. This could be caused by his eternal wait for *Advent Children* or too many late nights falling asleep in front of the television.

RYAN VULK

took on his first writing assignment with this month's look at the *FFXI* community. He then spent the next week beating down the rest of the staff, who are still mercilessly teasing him about the level of geekery to which he has descended.



ALEJANDRO CHAVETTA

is looking forward to the arrival of his new housemate, named "Little Hobo." Spending time with the ol' LH will mean late nights, very little sleep, and loads of bottles. Kind of like having Tara Reid for a roommate. Yay for that!

EXTENDED FAMILY

NICH MARAGOS

moved to San Francisco for the high-flying, laissez-faire life of a videogame freelancer. Recent deficits in the high-flying and laissez-faire departments have made him reconsider.

debaser.1UP.com

GREG FORD

is the reviews editor for *OPM*'s sister magazine, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*. He also recently discovered that girls do not like eating outside or riding in paddleboats.

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ROBERT ASHLEY

comes from Texas, where they grow their game reviewers tall and snarky. He also makes music in not one, but two different bands. He's multifunctional like that.

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GREG SEWART

hails from the same country cold comes from: Canada. He worked for *OPM*'s sister mag, *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, for years before joining, and then leaving, the game-design community.

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INPUT

THE VOICE OF THE PEOPLE...OR WHATEVER

LETTER OF THE MONTH

I just read with dismay that a sequel to *God of War* is on the way. The battle with Ares in the first game helped land me in the hospital for emergency surgery for a ruptured disc in my neck. Maybe they could add a warning: "THIS GAME COULD BE HAZARDOUS TO 45-YEAR-OLD BODY PARTS." Why am I dismayed about the sequel? Because I have to play it, regardless of the hazards—I loved the first one so much. I love my PlayStation and your magazine.

Off to bust a disc!

Linda Cardin
Via e-mail

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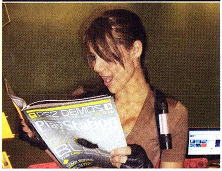

LARA CROFT LOVES OPM!

OMG, TOM BYRON NAMED THAT

In 1997, LucasArts made the 3D fighter *Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi* for the PlayStation. What would you recommend to be the best way of getting them to make a sequel/remake for the PS2? It is a fun game and even has some advantages over modern [fighting] games such as *Soul Calibur 3*. Even if you didn't like that game, would you deny the awesomeness of a PS2 Jedi duel to the death?

David Smith
Spring, Texas

Wow! David, you're in for a shocker: *OPM*'s very own editor-in-chief was the marketing manager for this game when he worked at LucasArts back in the day. Indeed, Tom Byron is the one who came up with the game's title (*teräs käsi* literally means "steel hands" in, like, Finnish, but was actually taken from the *Star Wars* paper role-playing game of the time). Oddly, many have bashed the title, even George Lucas himself (yeah, like he should talk; he came up with such memorable names as "Elan Sleazebaggano").

OPM would never "deny the awesomeness of a PS2 Jedi duel to the death," but we posed your query to LucasArts, and this was the response: "It's safe to say that a sequel to *Masters of Teräs Käsi* has about a snowball's chance on Mustafar of ever happening, but you can never totally rule anything out."

PANIC ON PLAYSTATION ST.

I'm tired of all the PS3 panic, and it's Microsoft's fault. After the horrific launch, complete with murderous shoppers, unit shortages, unfilled preorders, and those poor, half-alive souls who made it home with their Xbox 360s, only to have them crash? Gone are the days when I could just look forward to a system. People see analysts crying over how the uncertainty over the PS3 is hurting the industry. Since when have gamers had to give a damn about what a market analyst from JP Morgan has to say? Now the next-generation systems are under scrutiny because analysts don't believe [the hardware makers] can deliver as promised—especially Sony.

I have no reason to believe that Sony isn't going to deliver. Everybody should sit back with their PS2 and favorite games and just enjoy the anticipation.

Sharlin Espinal
Via e-mail

WINTERS IN NEW HAMPSHIRE

I cannot stand anybody who says, "Videogames rot your mind," or "They nullify creativity," or "Kids these days should be getting exercise," or "Violence is not entertainment." Give me a break, you pinheads! Excuse me, but when it is winter (and we have long ones here in New Hampshire) and it's 28 degrees outside with the wind blowing like crazy, I don't like to "go out and get some exercise." In winter, everyone gets cabin fever. What better way to cure it than with a little therapeutic road rage in *Burnout 3*? Or some all-out firefights in *Black*? Or maybe some *Red Faction II* or *Wipeout Pure* or *Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction* or a revisit to *Sly*? And the list goes on. Sure, in the summer, it's hot around the house, and you want to go outside. But in the winter, you can read *OPM* or a book, or draw. And you can indulge in some nice, fun, I-could-never-do-this-in-real-life gaming.

So those people who make a huge stink about videogames or TV seem to be wasting their time, because everyone knows people will just continue the bloody decapitations. And sure, M games can go a little far sometimes. But it's just a losing battle, you philistines. How dare you deny me the right to my *King Kong* or, eventually, my *Okami*?

Anonymous
Via e-mail

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

I was looking through the magazines at the local mall, and I came upon your March 2006 issue [*OPM* #102]. How happy I was to read on the back of the magazine wrap that there was a preview of *Metal Gear Solid 3: Subsistence,* since I am a big fan of the series and am eagerly anticipating [this game]. How disappointed I was to find that this "preview" was just a screenshot with a caption that basically said: "We don't actually have anything to offer, so here's a nice picture." Yeah, great preview. I am a college student, and I can't afford to spend $15 Canadian on your magazines if they aren't going to deliver what they promise. The fact that you have stooped to such cheap,

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underhanded marketing is sad, and if this entire ordeal hadn't convinced me that your magazine has become nothing more than a sponge for profits, I'd ask for a refund. But since I know I'd never get it, I'll leave you with this: You have lost me as a reader, at least until I get a written apology. Oh, and I don't expect this letter to be published; that would require some sort of backbone on your part.

Devon Sheppard
Newfoundland, Canada

Dang it, Devon, we really wish you had visited your local mall just a month earlier. Then you would have seen the February issue (*OPM* #101) featuring none other than Hideo Kojima himself on the cover. That issue also included a real preview of *Subsistence*, plus the goods on *Metal Gear Acid 2*. We hope that you visit the mall soon to pick up the April issue (*OPM* #103) to read the 5/5 review we gave *Subsistence*. We also did some research and found that all the *OPM* staffers are, in fact, vertebrates.

GIVE OR TAKE 50

I'm kind of weird when it comes to stuff like this, but in your review of *Black* on page 77 of *OPM* #102 [March 2006], you state that the M249 LMG has an ammunition capacity of 150 rounds. The actual SAW [squad automatic weapon] has box magazines that hold 200 rounds of 5.56 x 45mm rounds, not 150.

Matt Y.
Via e-mail

AND YOUR POINT?

On page 26 of *OPM* #102 [March 2006], you say that *GTA: Liberty City Stories* is being ported from the PSP to the PS2. Then you say you hope this isn't the start of a new trend, because, if so, then what would be the point of the PSP? I've been asking that question since the [PSP] hit the stores: What is the point of the PSP? What's that you say? I can watch movies on it? Well, for half the price, I can buy a portable DVD player—and hey, I don't have to rebuy movies in a special format just to watch them someplace else.

So that only leaves the fact that it is a portable game player. But really, maybe it's just me, but wouldn't it have made more sense to make the PSP play the PS2 games I already own? What's that? They make attachable screens for the PS2 [that let it] be played anywhere, so a portable version is pointless? Wow, then the only point of the PSP is that it has games not on PS2. So to answer your question: THERE IS NO POINT!! ONLY PEOPLE WITH TOO MUCH MONEY AND NO BRAINS WOULD WASTE THEIR TIME WITH THE OBVIOUSLY OVERHYPED PSP!!

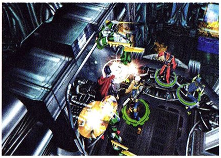
Hope your month went well; have fun.

Nathan Carlisle
Via e-mail

Now, now, Nathan, don't you think you're being a bit too harsh? Why, just look at this issue! It features a veritable cornucopia of PSP fun and excitement. We've never been more impressed and satisfied with Sony's handheld. In fact, EIC Tom loves SOE's *Field Commander* so much, he's been accused of—*gasp!*—being a fanboy! Do you see our point?

READER REVIEWS

WHERE YOU AUDITION FOR OUR JOBS



X-MEN LEGENDS II: RISE OF APOCALYPSE

WHAT YOU SAID

I first shrugged off *X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse* for the PS2, out of fear of having to do some goofy side missions with another Magma-esque character. Upon hearing that it strictly uses the RPG formula, I rushed for my *OPM*, and the review for the PSP version caught my eye. Using the same basic top-down, dungeon-crawling/leveling-up gameplay style of the original and slightly improving the visuals makes it not only a great sequel, but also a perfect portable game. Crushing Apocalypse's minions with the X-Men and Brotherhood is perfect for gaming on the go—so long as you don't go through a door. Load times are atrocious on the PSP, but it still doesn't take away from the fantastically fun experience and convenient portability of this nearly perfect port. Extra unlockable characters, as well as more levels than its console sibling, give the title a vast amount of replay value. Being a superhero game doesn't hurt, either. | *Mitchell Dyer*

READER SCORE 4.5 | 5

WHAT WE SAID

"The story and colorful, cel-shaded graphics are top-notch, but *XML2* absolutely shines when it comes to team management.... This is exactly the kind of game the PSP needs."

OPM SCORE 4.5 | 5

BATTLEFIELD 2: MODERN COMBAT

WHAT YOU SAID

Wow! I just [stopped playing] *Battlefield 2: Modern Combat* online because I couldn't wait another minute to promote this game. This game is strictly for online play. But saying that means absolutely nothing, because the online play is the best I've ever seen on the PS2! This left me saying, "*SOCOM* who?"

I personally will take an FPS over a third-person shooter any day of the week. Those of you out there who fell into the *SOCOM* trap, and those of you who believe that maybe you're just not the military-game type: You are dead wrong. EA took the award-winning online play from the PC version of the game and then packed it into new, stylized online play for the PS2, making it newbie friendly as well as veteran friendly.

Don't worry if you're tired of the graphics and getting wasted in *SOCOM 3*; buy *Modern Combat*, a game every PS2 onliner should have. | *Chad Merkley*

READER SCORE 4.5 | 5

WHAT WE SAID

"*Modern Combat* loses some points for its lack of realism and forgettable story line, but still serves as a decent war game for those of us too fragile to enlist."

OPM SCORE 4 | 5

Want to have your say about a recent game? Think you can do better than us? Send your review (don't forget the score!) to opm@ziffdavis.com with the subject "READER REVIEW."

BLOG OF THE MONTH

It's Shameless Self-Promotion Month here at *OPM*, in which we take the opportunity to remind you that each of the staff has his/her own blog on 1UP. Here they are—be sure to visit them all.

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giancarlov.1UP.com

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logans_run.1UP.com

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CLUB OF THE MONTH

Tomb Raider and Lara Croft fans will find kindred spirits here at one of the hottest clubs on 1UP. *Angel of Darkness* fans welcome, too. tombraider-club.1UP.com

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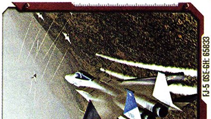

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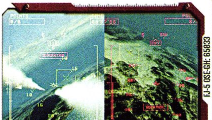

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PlayStation 2

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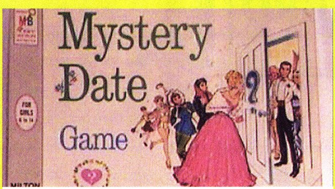
GAMERS ARE TALKING ABOUT

STRAIGHT FROM THE OPM MESSAGE BOARDS (BOARDS.1UP.COM)


Mystery Date Game

THE PS3'S MYSTERY DATE

Life is never dull on the *OPM* message boards. Unusualgroove36, playing the role of bookie, posed this question on everyone's mind: "OK, Sony said spring for PS3. I know, I know: It's possible that it means a spring release for Japan and fall for the U.S., but you'd think you would have heard a release date or price by now. I'm thinking the PS3 isn't hitting the U.S. till '07. Any takers?"

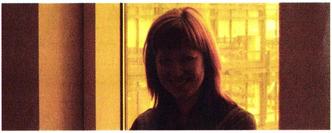
Botkiller replies, "I'm doubting that it'll even be out by fall. There's no way in hell it'll be out in spring."

"It's no mere coincidence that Sony's PS2 launched around the same day as the original PS," notes FinalFantasyRuler88. "I suspect the same for the PS3. Just before the holidays, just to get people willing to dish out the money."

Fox-Brutus opines, "There's as much a chance for spring PS3 as there is for spring *Final Fantasy XII*."

Unusualgroove36 then rejoined the fray: "And the chances of that are slim to none, and slim just left town. I know that there is no way for a U.S. spring release, but up until February 1, I was thinking that at least a Japan spring release was going to happen."

Sclubbinallday answered, "I have a better chance of winning the lottery than the PS3 [has of] launching in spring of this year.... I doubt it will be out this year at all."



FROM ME TO YOU

Dear Everybody,

After months of speculating about the PlayStation 3, Sony has finally given us some hard, cold facts about their plans. The fact we're most excited about is that we now know for sure this holiday season, PlayStation gamers will get to go to the next generation—for all the details, and what we think about the announcements, check out our feature on page 36.

Speaking of system debuts, it's hard to believe that it's already been 12 months since we were sitting outside the Sony Metreon, watching fans brave horrible weather in order to be one of the first people to own a PlayStation Portable. Things were a little bit rough for Sony's little console that could in those first few months, but now, with a solid year under its belt, we're thrilled to say that the PSP is coming into its own quite nicely. To see some of the great new titles we can look forward to in the upcoming year, turn to our extensive cover story on page 52 (helmed by resident PSP expert Giancarlo).

And once you've finished feasting your eyes on the games to come, turn over to the PSP reviews on page 90 to see some of the great games that are out now. This issue marks the debut of a Game of the Month for the PS2 *and* the PSP, so it's only fitting that it's also home to the first PSP game to receive a perfect score.

It's a great time to be a PlayStation fan.

Cheers,

Dana Jongewaard, Managing Editor

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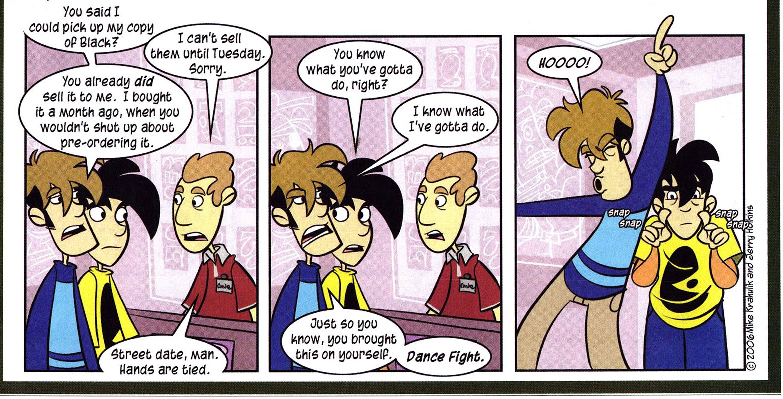
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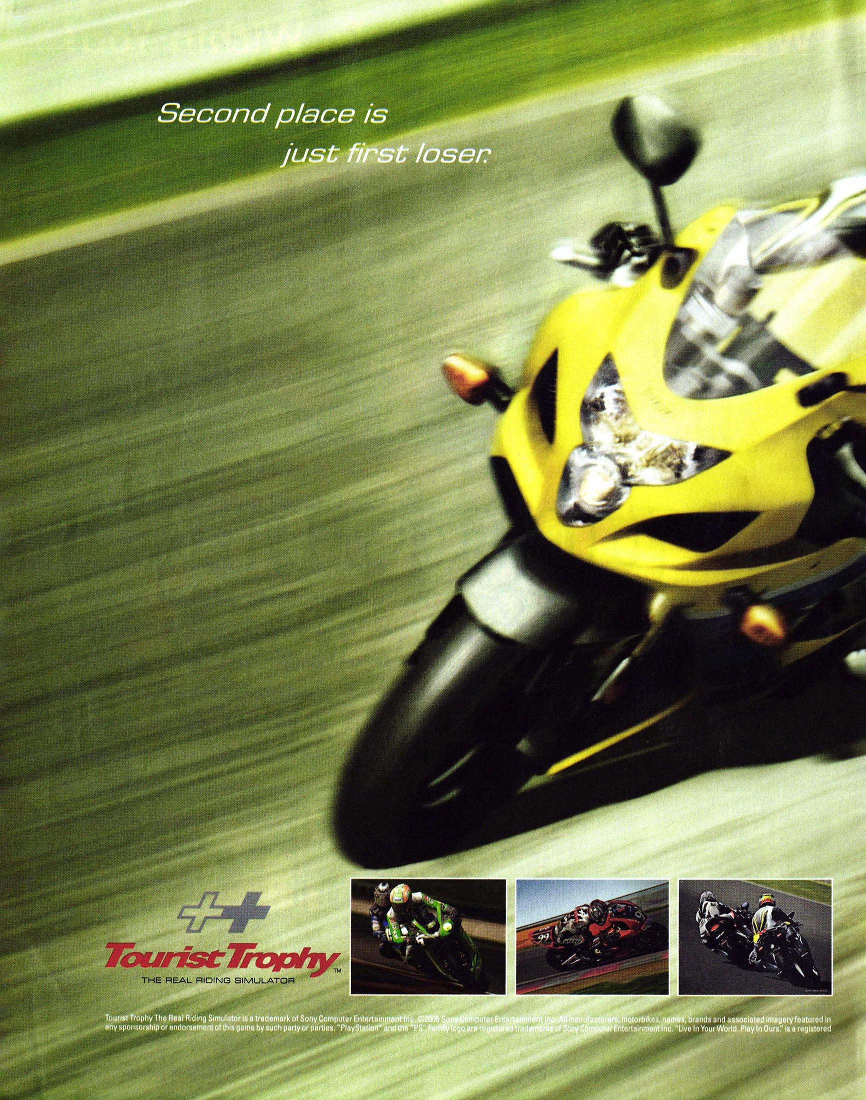
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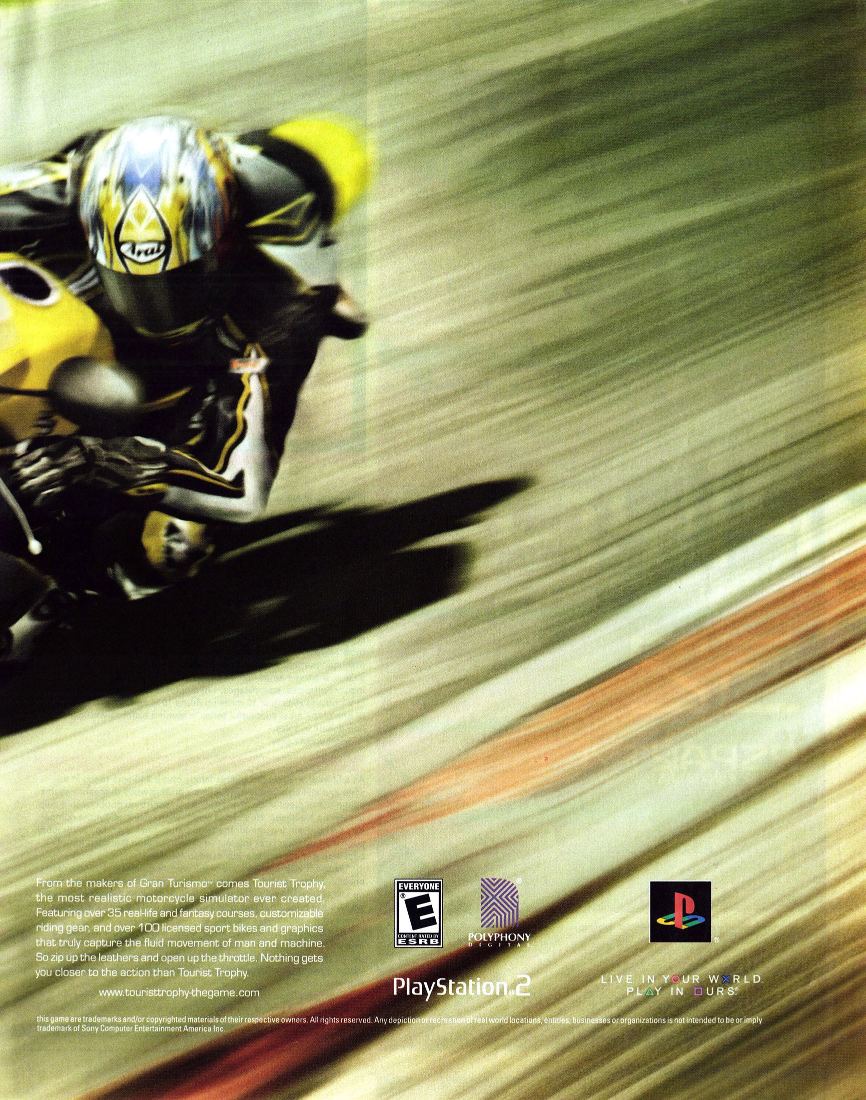
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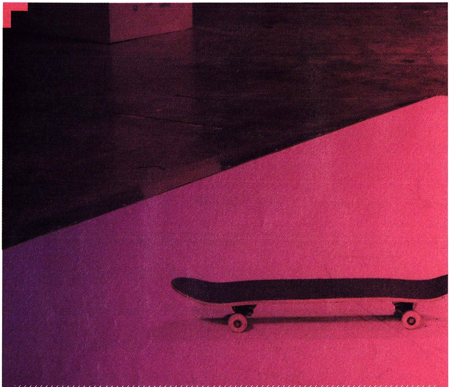

HYPE

PREVIEWS AND NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF PLAYSTATION

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PSPARTY!

COME CELEBRATE THE PSP'S BIRTHDAY!

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Or is it K-Town?

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You know—the kind that refreshes.

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You say you want a release date? And you want to know about online? Turn here for all of that—and more!

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SOCOM producer Seth Luisi talks about the future of the franchise.

42 CALENDAR
Because you love it!

44 PS2 PREVIEWS
So a paid assassin, a team of spandex-wearing buddies, and a guy named Vinnie walk into a bar...

NEVER

THE HOUSE THAT TONY

In the case of Neversoft, the English poet William Blake only had it partly right. True, "great things are done when men and mountains meet," but for the development powerhouse behind the *Tony Hawk* franchise, great things are done "when men, darts, and alcohol meet."

"[The name] Neversoft came from me and my buddies out in the garage, playing darts, drinking beer," explains company cofounder and president Joel Jewett. "At the time, a lot of companies just put something in front of 'soft,' and one of my buddies says, 'Heh, heh. Neversoft! Heh, heh!' and I was like, 'Wow, cool! Yeah, we'll do that!'"

That was in 1994, when Jewett, a down-to-earth former CPA originally from Great Falls, MT, formed Neversoft with Malibu Interactive coworkers Chris Ward (now Neversoft's art director) and Mick West (now retired). Financing the company through credit cards, with informal headquarters at the King George Pub in Santa Monica, CA (now a Gap), the three embarked on a road that would eventually lead to indoor half-pipes, soundstages, 140 employees, a posh business park in Woodland Hills (just 10 miles up Route 101), and the establishment of one of the most successful series in gaming history—with over a billion dollars in sales.

But it wasn't easy.

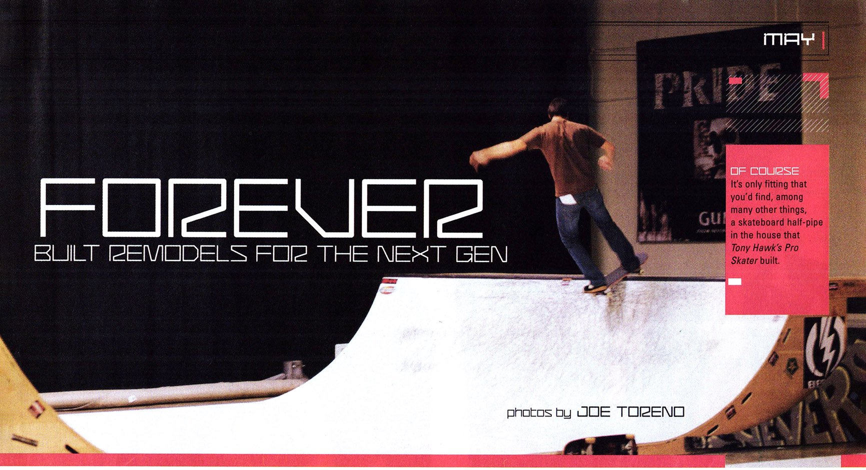
NEVERSOFT, B.T. (BEFORE TONY)

As a Montana native (he and his family own a 240-acre ranch in the state and still visit frequently), Jewett's gruff cowboy demeanor seems a little out of place in Southern California, but it's no doubt been a help in running Neversoft. He's circumspect when talking about the company's first project, a game for the Sega Saturn (and later the PlayStation) published by Playmates Interactive called *Skeleton Warriors*, loosely based on a spin-off of the '80s cartoon *He-Man*.

"*Skeleton Warriors* was one of the world's greatest learning experiences," Jewett says. "I woke up with like a month or two before our deadline, [and the publisher was] calling and asking to see where were we at. I went and double-checked where we were at with the guys, and I realized we didn't have a producer.

"So I became a producer. I wrote down a list of all the assets and everything that needed to get done, and I helped decide what *was* gonna get done, what *wasn't* gonna get done—and together, we all pulled a game together and shipped it. And it got our money back, so that was cool."

Neversoft's lessons didn't end there. Adopting a rule of always having a second project in the works, programmers began what would



FOREVER

BUILT REMODELS FOR THE NEXT GEN

OF COURSE
It's only fitting that you'd find, among many other things, a skateboard half-pipe in the house that *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* built.

photos by JOE TORENO

become a successful PlayStation port of the PC game *MDK*.

And then came *Big Guns*, an original game for the PlayStation commissioned and funded by Sony—and a game that never saw the light of day. "It was a beautiful thing. But between Sony and Neversoft, we completely f***ed it up," Jewett admits. "It started off as a pretty cool mech shooter with kind of a cool name. At some point, it got renamed *Exodus*, and by the time it got s***-canned, it was a chick who morphed into a cat."

"During *Big Guns*/*Exodus*," Jewett recalls, "we rewrote our tools within [the 3D-rendering program] 3D Max, and we had all that stuff ready to rock and roll—it was basically a third-person shooter. Sony told us they were going to extend the contract on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving, so we could have a glorious—yee-haw!—Thanksgiving weekend.

"Then they called us on Monday, punched us in the freaking gonads, and said, 'Sorry, we're pulling the plug.' At least when we were done, we owned the technology."

"I thought it was pretty cool that they didn't mess with our weekend," grins art director Chris Ward.

Jewett continues with a smile, "Yeah, except for the fact that we had no money. Those were the good ol' days.... After that, we kept our team together. No money. No gig.

"And we got to the point where we had a meeting: 'Here's the deal. We have to stick together. We have to do all these game demos. We have to get another gig. The value in this company lies in this team. But we don't know if we can do that. We're going to ask you guys to freakin' do everything you can to pull this off. But you can feel free to use the telephones while you're here during the day to try to find yourself another job.'

"So, [after] we had that meeting, it got to the point where we did a half payroll. Then we did a quarter payroll. We had our line of credit fully tapped. Things were looking bad.

"And then up pops Activision."

BRUCE WILLIS AND SKATEBOARDING

Following a grueling series of game demos and pitches ranging from racing to golf, Neversoft was tapped by Activision. Jewett remembers, "[They said,] 'You know, we've got this *Apocalypse* debacle happening, and our own internal team just can't get this game to run. And we're in it for, like, X millions of dollars. Do you think you guys could just ship something by next Christmas?' And we're like, 'F*** yeah! We'll do anything! We don't have any money! Where do I sign?'"

Ward, a red-headed Yorkshire lad with a brogue as thick as the San Francisco fog, recalls that proprietary programming tools were the ace in Neversoft's hand. "When we changed from this proprietary layout tool system, we moved to 3D Max and used its UI features that all of our artists were familiar with and didn't try and re-create that. And then we got this kick-ass tool system that we've always had—and what we've always, always relied upon. Without cool tools, we could never do this. And we did *Apocalypse* like in eight months—f***ing crazy. And without the tool system, it would've never happened. And since then, that's always been like our mantra here."

Apocalypse was in poor condition at the point Neversoft was called in, Ward recalls: "When we got the project, *Apocalypse* was a two-player game. It was like, Bruce Willis was your 'buddy.' So you spent all this cash on Bruce Willis, and he's your buddy. So, we're like, 'F*** this. You're playing him.' We got rid of the 'you,' and you played Bruce Willis."

The *Apocalypse* process and sales went well enough for Neversoft to get more projects from Activision. One in particular would change the developer forever.

> "AND WE'RE LIKE, 'F**** YEAH! WE'LL DO ANYTHING! WE DON'T HAVE ANY MONEY! WHERE DO I SIGN?'"

"Activision comes to us and says, 'There's this huge trend happening right now, and that trend is skateboarding. You guys think you could make a videogame based on skateboarding?'" Jewett recalls. "I was like, 'Yeah, s***, I used to skateboard. That sounds really fun.' Plus, if there's a whole bunch of people [starting to skateboard], businesswise, I'm like, 'Well, f*** yeah, let's see what we can do.' And Scott [Pease] was at Activision at the time, and he was behind getting that whole thing rolling also."

TONY HAWK YEARS

Invoking a steady-as-a-rock bearing, Scott Pease, Neversoft's director of development, remembers well when the *Tony Hawk* project surfaced. An associate producer at Activision at the time, he recalls the first time Hawk saw the game. "The Neversoft demo was a street. It had a half-pipe, and it had a skater. And you could skate, and you could do a kick-flip or just a basic trick. Tony was pulled in for this meeting at

Cofounder and president of Neversoft Joel Jewett, along with art director and cofounder Chris Ward and director of development Scott Pease

Activision. He comes in and he just looks like a kid; he's got torn-up cargo pants. And they pull him into a boardroom, and it's, like, all these suits—whoosh!—down the whole thing. They pull up the PowerPoint presentation: 'SKATEBOARDING'S GOING OFF THE CHARTS!' Tony just sat there the whole time and just sank, just looked so bored.

"Finally, the last part of the presentation was myself and [fellow producer] Dave Stohl. We wheeled in the Neversoft demo, and all of a sudden Tony perked up. We showed it to him, let him play a little bit, and showed him the trick list that we wanted to put in the game—it was all based on real tricks in skateboarding. That got him going. And he signed up just a couple of months after that, so then it was full steam ahead."

As is the case with many blockbusters, Activision and Neversoft didn't realize what they had in *Tony Hawk* until the game hit the market. "The funny thing is," Pease says, "the [*Tony Hawk*] project was like this little thing. Activision told us, 'If you can sell 250,000 units, we can break even. Everyone will be happy. Neversoft will get their money back; we'll have a little bit of success. It'll be a cool thing.' And that's sort of where it started."

Oddly, things might have gone very differently for the *Tony Hawk* franchise if one key change had been made to the original design.

"There was an early debate: Is it a racing game, or is it a trick-based game?" Pease recalls. "And I remember that being a critical issue, especially over at Activision. The marketing guys were like, 'Gotta do racing! Everything's racing! *Cool Boarders*, blah blah blah!' But the whole essence of skateboarding was tricking, being creative, and finding new ways to use the environment. I mean, that was the essence of skateboarding, and that was the backbone of the game design."

It was a debate that Neversoft thankfully won. To date, the *Tony Hawk* games have garnered numerous awards and grossed over a billion dollars in sales.

GEARING UP FOR THE NEXT GENERATION

The Neversoft story could fill its own volume in a history of videogames. There was a little game the company made called *Spider-Man*, for instance, and most recently a successful attempt to build a new, original intellectual property in *Gun*, a third-person shooter that lets you assume the role of a cowboy.

Since Neversoft obviously isn't going to be leaving the game development community any time soon, it will probably be able to fill many more volumes as it heads into the next generation of consoles. Like in the early days, it still isn't going to be easy. "One of the challenges of the next gen is fielding these larger and larger teams," Jewett says. "It's more complicated, and it's more difficult to do, and the nature of many people's jobs changes. Because there was a day—not very long ago—when I could even sit in every single design meeting that we had, and I f***ing loved it! It was great! That s*** is fun! But I can't do that anymore."

Pease agrees. "The 'big-team challenge' is a huge issue, because games are getting more complicated as we go into next gen," he says. "The character that took one guy one week to make now takes that same guy maybe three weeks to make or four weeks to make. You have to add more people, so then you have to layer on a level of infrastructure and communication. It's harder to keep everybody as focused as they were before."

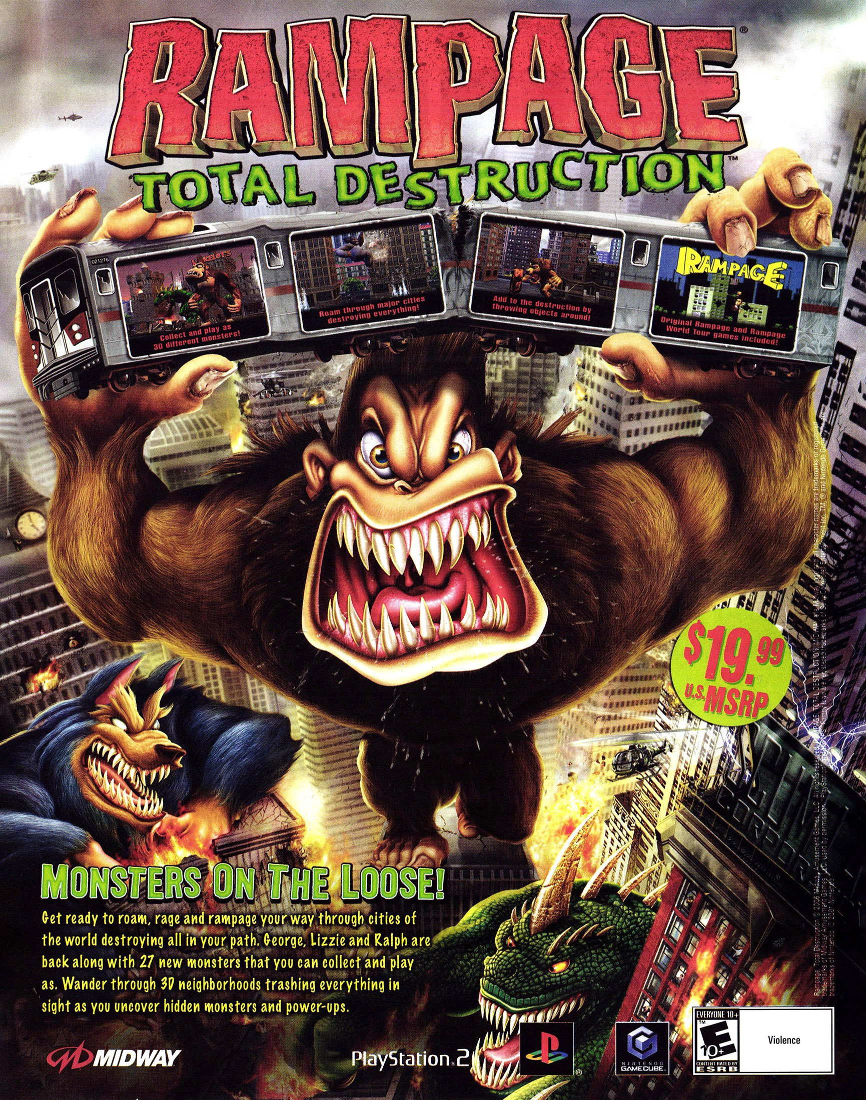
> "THERE WAS AN EARLY DEBATE: IS IT A RACING GAME, OR IS IT A TRICK-BASED GAME?"

Ward closes with a hope for smaller studios to thrive. "You talk about big teams, but what I've been reading about is the independents," he says. "[Neversoft's] getting to be like a big movie studio, in a sense. We can do these huge projects. We've got composers; we've got writers. And we're following that path.

"But then there are still games like *Guitar Hero* that pop up, where it's like a small team, independent. If you look at their assets—there are no assets! It's just one screen. Stuff like that, I think, has to keep happening. If that goes away, and it's just *Lord of the Rings*, *Madden*, *Tony Hawk*—what a boring world that's gonna be!"

STUDIO RÉSUMÉ

Skeleton Warriors
1996, PlayStation
Apocalypse
1998, PlayStation
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater
1999, PlayStation
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2
2000, PlayStation
Spider-Man
2000, PlayStation
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3
2001, PlayStation 2
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4
2002, PlayStation 2
Tony Hawk's Underground
2003, PlayStation 2
Tony Hawk's Underground 2
2004, PlayStation 2
Tony Hawk's American Wasteland
2005, PlayStation 2
Gun
2005, PlayStation 2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NINTENDO GAMECUBE
EVERYONE 10+
E 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Violence

MONSTERS ON THE LOOSE!

Get ready to roam, rage and rampage your way through cities of the world destroying all in your path. George, Lizzie and Ralph are back along with 27 new monsters that you can collect and play as. Wander through 3D neighborhoods trashing everything in sight as you uncover hidden monsters and power-ups.

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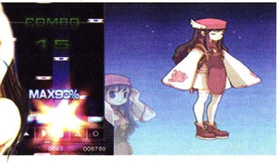
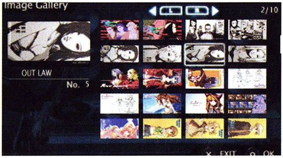
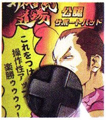






SONY
GIGA PACK
1GB
PORTABLE

D-PAD DILEMMA The special add-on for the PSP's D-pad is great if you're a hardcore fighting-game fan and you absolutely need that little extra bit of precision. But for the most part, the unadorned D-pad gets the job done for fighting games and most other PSP games.

J-TOWN

DJ-TO-GO WITH YOUR PSP

This month in J-Town, we're gonna kick it up a notch. From J...to K. That's right—welcome to "K-Town"! Time to expand your horizons as we set our sights on a new and emerging PlayStation market: Korea.

South Korea is best known in the West as the land of hardcore online gamers: fiercely competitive *StarCraft* tournaments, 24-hour Internet cafés, and MMORPG feuds that spill real-world blood. Recently, however, console and handheld gaming have begun to make inroads into the country's PC-based gaming culture. Like Japan, South Korea is a country crisscrossed by ubiquitous public transportation. It's only natural, then, that one of South Korea's most polished non-PC efforts to date is for the Sony PSP.

Pentavision Entertainment's *DJ Max Portable* is a handheld rhythm-action game with gameplay "inspired by" Konami's *Beatmania* games. OK, let's be honest here—it's a complete and utter rip-off. But it's hard to hold that against it. Like the much-lauded, Harmonix-developed *Guitar Hero*—inspired by Konami's *Guitar Freaks*—*DJ Max Portable* makes enough tweaks to the standard formula to make the gameplay feel fresh again. (Besides, Konami hasn't produced a portable Bemani title of its own in over five years.)

The gameplay in *DJ Max Portable* consists of hitting "notes" as they scroll down the screen in time with the music. Each of the game's nearly 60 songs has four-, six-, and eight-key versions, with several further subdivisions into "easy" and "hard" versions for a certain number of keys. Players can also hide, reverse, and randomize note placement, as well as modify the speed at which notes appear. Songs run the gamut from traditional techno, breakbeat, and drum and bass to K-pop, Korean hip-hop, and heavy metal. The overall package is extremely polished, with fully animated music videos for each song, a wide variety of stylish interface skins, and plenty of secret unlockables.

Korea is extremely proud of this native videogame son, as *DJ Max Portable* has been the subject of a huge promotional push. In addition to regular and deluxe editions, the game is even being bundled with the PSP hardware as a "Premium Gigapack." Fortunately, *DJ Max Portable* delivers on the hype—hopefully, it represents the beginning of an upswing in Korean console and portable development.

A CRITICAL SUCCESS

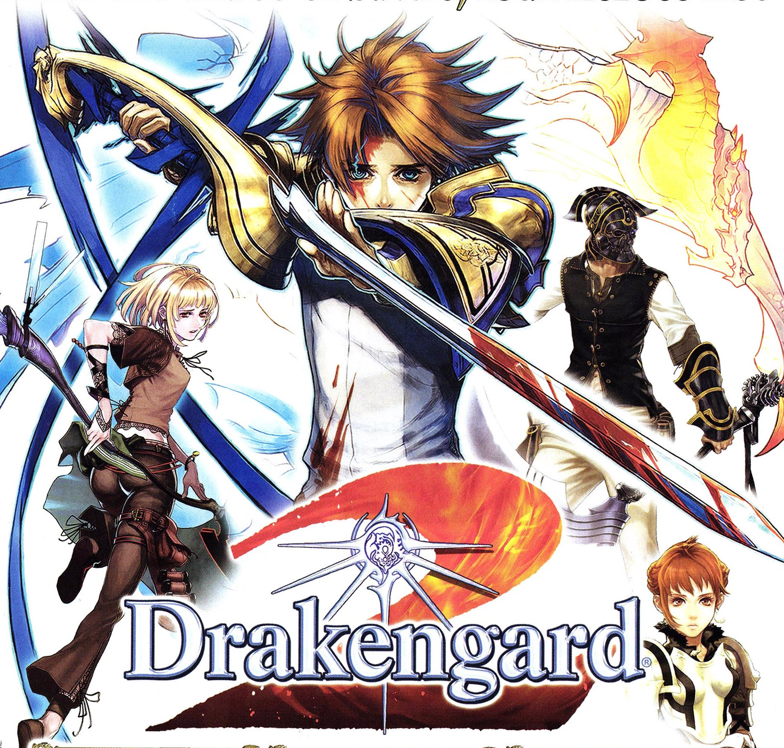
Soon after the PSP launched in December 2004, some early adopters expressed disappointment in its form-factor: The four distinct directional buttons, with their tough-to-hit diagonals, were a particular point of contention. SCEI president Ken Kutaragi was quick to go on the offensive, famously stating that "people may complain about its usability, but that's something users and game software developers will have to adapt to...it wasn't a mistake. I believe we made the most beautiful thing in the world. Nobody would criticize a renowned architect's blueprint."

> IT'S ONLY NATURAL THAT ONE OF SOUTH KOREA'S MOST POLISHED NON-PC EFFORTS IS FOR THE PSP.

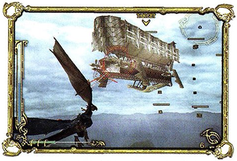
Well, nobody except Capcom. In Japan, the initial shipment of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* for the PSP came bundled with a plastic "cap" that sits on top of the PSP's directional buttons like a rocker switch. This tiny accoutrement makes a huge difference: Hitting diagonals becomes second nature, and circular motions just roll off the thumb. Capcom's "support pad" is a great boon to other games, too, especially twitch-happy arcade games and side-scrolling action titles.

Unfortunately, Capcom's self-limited supply turned this elegant solution into an expensive collector's item. Currently, the cap alone is selling for $30 on the Japanese Yahoo! Auctions site—nearly three-quarters of the cost of *Street Fighter Alpha 3* itself. No matter what Kutaragi might claim, beauty is in the eye of the game-holder.

From the chaos of battle, four heroes rise



Switch between 4 characters with unique weapons and abilities.



Lay waste to entire armies on the ground and in the air.

Annihilate enemies with more than 60 weapons in over 90 missions.

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MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Blood
Violence

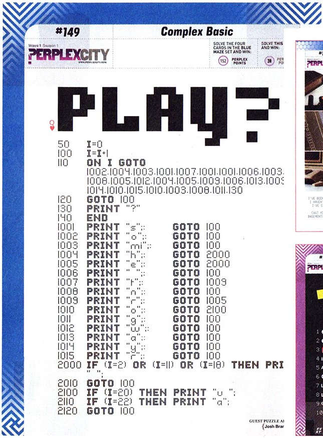
PlayStation®2

SQUARE ENIX™

UBISOFT

PAUSE WHEN YOU'RE NOT PLAYING GAMES

FEEL



#149 **Complex Basic**

Wave 1 Season 1

PERPLEXCITY

www.perplexcity.com

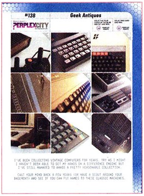
SOLVE THE FOUR CARDS IN THE BLUE MAZE SET AND WIN: 152 PERPLEX POINTS

SOLVE THIS AND WIN: 38 PER PO

PLAY?

```
50   I=0
100  I=I+1
110  ON I GOTO
     1002.1004.1003.1001.1007.1001.1001.1006.1003.
     1008.1005.1012.1004.1005.1009.1006.1013.100
     1014.1010.1015.1010.1003.1008.1011.130
120  GOTO 100
130  PRINT "?"
140  END
1001 PRINT "s";:     GOTO 100
1002 PRINT "o";:     GOTO 100
1003 PRINT "mi";:    GOTO 100
1004 PRINT "h";:     GOTO 2000
1005 PRINT "e";:     GOTO 2000
1006 PRINT " ";:     GOTO 100
1007 PRINT "t";:     GOTO 1009
1008 PRINT "n";:     GOTO 100
1009 PRINT "r";:     GOTO 1005
1010 PRINT "o";:     GOTO 2100
1011 PRINT "g";:     GOTO 100
1012 PRINT "w";:     GOTO 100
1013 PRINT "a";:     GOTO 100
1014 PRINT "y";:     GOTO 100
1015 PRINT "z";:     GOTO 100
2000 IF (I=2) OR (I=11) OR (I=18) THEN PRI
     " ";
2010 GOTO 100
2100 IF (I=20) THEN PRINT "u ";
2110 IF (I=22) THEN PRINT "a";
2120 GOTO 100
```

GUEST PUZZLE A
Josh Brar

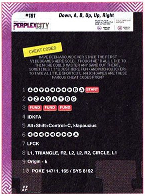


#138 **Geek Antiques**

PERPLEXCITY

I'VE BEEN COLLECTING VINTAGE COMPUTERS FOR YEARS. TRY AS I MIGHT I HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO GET MY HANDS ON A DIFFERENCE ENGINE BUT I'VE STILL MANAGED TO AMASS A PRETTY REASONABLE COLLECTION.

CAST YOUR MIND BACK A FEW YEARS (OR HAVE A SCOUT AROUND YOUR BASEMENT) AND SEE IF YOU CAN PUT NAMES TO THESE CLASSIC MACHINES.



#181 **Down, A, B, Up, Up, Right**

PERPLEXCITY

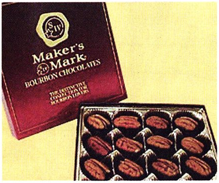
CHEAT CODES HAVE BEEN AROUND EVER SINCE THE FIRST VIDEOGAMES WERE SOLD. THOUGH WE'D ALL LIKE TO THINK WE COULD MASTER ANY GAME OUT THERE, SOMETIMES IT'S JUST MORE FUN (AND MUCH QUICKER) TO TAKE A LITTLE SHORTCUT. WHICH GAMES ARE THESE FAMOUS CHEAT CODES FROM?

1 ▲ ▲ ▼ ▼ ◀ ▶ ◀ ▶ B A START
2 ▼ Z ▲ X A Y B C
3 FUND FUND FUND
4 IDKFA
5 Alt+Shift+Control+C, klapaucius
6 ◀ ▶ ◀ ▶ ◀ ◀ ▶ ▶ A
7 LFCK
8 L1, TRIANGLE, R2, L2, L2, R2, CIRCLE, L1
9 Origin - k
10 POKE 14711, 165 / SYS 8192

PERPLEX CITY

www.perplexcity.com

Turns out the rabbit hole for this puzzle-game/collectible-card-game/alternate-reality-game is *very* deep. Solve puzzles on collectible cards to fill in pieces of an epic story that extends into the real world. The ultimate goal: Find the stolen "Receda Cube"—hidden somewhere in the real, physical world—and earn $200,000 in real-world cash.



BOURBON BALLS

www.epicurious.com

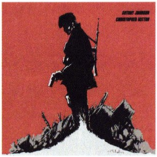
Those of us at *OPM* love our candy. But we *really* love our candy when it comes laced with the sweet tang of Kentucky's finest bourbon. Whether you go store-bought (the Maker's Mark people make a nice box) or try your own (we crush up Nilla Wafers and pecans with cocoa, powdered sugar, corn syrup, and a good bourbon—try Knob Creek or Woodford Reserve), they're a delicious treat. And if you don't feel like cooking, there's always the bourbon-ball cocktail (one part bourbon, one part Godiva, and a splash of grenadine).

SEE

CARDINALS STADIUM

www.azcardinals.com/stadium

The Cardinals may have only had one winning season since moving to Arizona, but they still got $355 million for a new home. Designed by Peter Eisenman, the metal-clad stadium is built in the shape of a rattlesnake. It has a retractable roof, but cooler still is the natural-grass field, which is built onto a 12-million-pound tray that can slide all the way out of the stadium so the grass can get the necessary sunlight. Maybe now they'll win some games.



QUEEN & COUNTRY

www.onipress.com

Focused on Tara Chace, an operative of a fictional special-operations section of the U.K.'s SIS (or MI6), the story follows missions that range from preventing a nerve-gas attack at the World Cup to investigating the French government blackmailing a British citizen; every operation is unique, tense, and much more realistic than the gadget porn of other spy thrillers. And even if you are totally anti–graphic novels, you can pick up the two prose novels.

LISTEN

AT WAR WITH THE MYSTICS

www.flaminglips.com

As of press time, we've only heard two songs, so it may be premature to call the Flaming Lips' new album one of our favorites of the year. But based on those tracks, and the fact that the band seems to only improve with each outing, we're going to make just that prediction. After all, how can you not love a group that comes up with song titles like "The Wizard Turns on...the Giant Silver Flashlight and Puts on His Werewolf Moccasins"?

KCRW

www.kcrw.com

We might argue that the streaming radio off the coolest NPR station in the country isn't actually free, if only because you end up buying a whole bunch of new music after hearing a only few broadcasts. Nic Harcourt and his fellow DJs introduce their listeners to a constant stream of new, up-and-coming artists who won't show up on mainstream radio. If you've ever wanted to feel like you have cooler musical tastes than any of your friends, this is a great place to start.

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PlayStation®2

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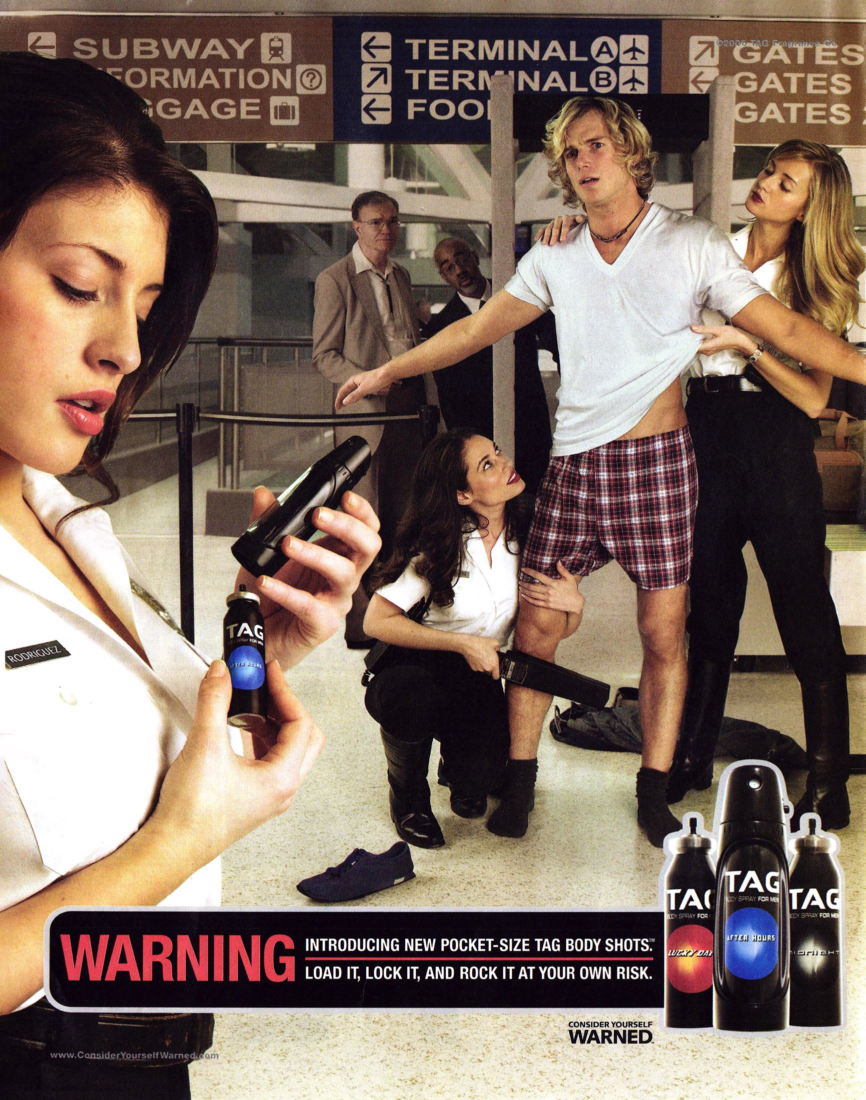
SUBWAY
FORMATION
GGAGE
TERMINAL A
TERMINAL B
FOO
GATES
GATES
GATES
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AFTER HOURS
LUCKY DA
MIDNIGHT

WARNING

INTRODUCING NEW POCKET-SIZE TAG BODY SHOTS.™

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TRENDSPOTTER

FACIAL HAIR

In light of the recent Olympics, we thought it'd be appropriate to bring attention to another competition—one so fierce that it requires dozens of years of training, and one that only the stoutest men, and maybe some women, could endure. Yes, we're talking about the World Beard and Moustache Championships, and we can't help but notice that some developers and game characters look like they're gearing up for the next one, to be held in Brighton, England, in 2007.

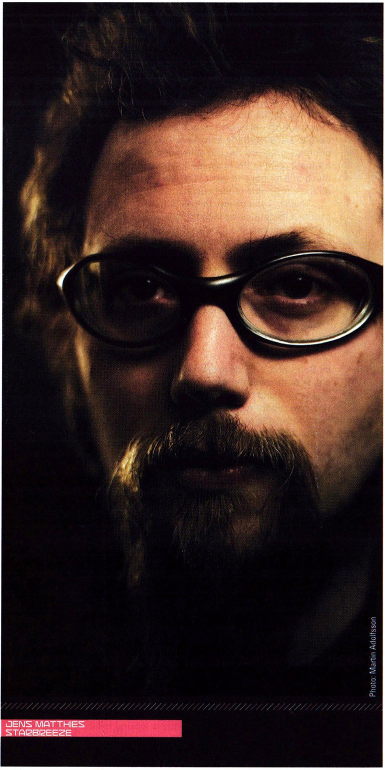


Photo: Martin Adolfsson

JENS MATTHIES
STARBREEZE

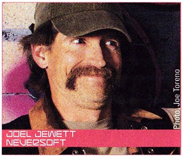
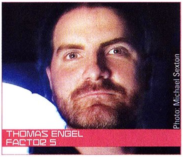


Photo: Joe Toreno

JOEL JEWETT
NEVERSOFT



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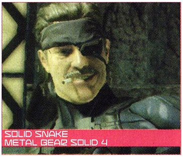
THOMAS ENGEL
FACTOR 5

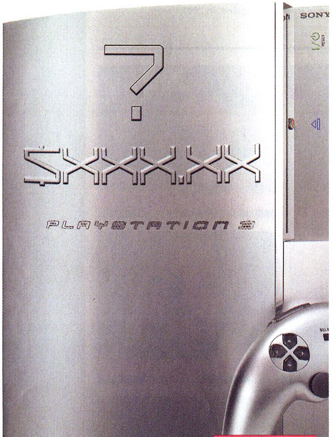


SOLID SNAKE
METAL GEAR SOLID 4

TAG
BODY SPRAY FOR MEN
AFTER HOURS
FOR YOUR LUGGAGE
FOR YOUR POCKET
FOR YOUR PRE-FLIGHT PAT-DOWN
CONSIDER YOURSELF
WARNED

THE BIG PICTURE

by John Scalzi



JOHN SCALZI likes watching movies and playing games as well as playing games on systems that play movies. Tell him what you think about Sony's strategy at www.scalzi.com.

RISKY BUSINESS

Earlier this year, research analysts at financial powerhouse Merrill Lynch said they believe that, at its launch, each PlayStation 3 Sony pumps out is going to cost the company around $800 to produce, with the most costly components being the Cell CPU (which they estimated costing $230 per unit) and the Blu-ray DVD player (a whopping $350 per unit). In order to be competitive with the Xbox 360, the PS3 will need to retail in the $400 range, which (simple math here) means that Sony sucks down a $400 loss each time someone buys the PS3. Bear in mind that Merrill Lynch's cost estimates are just that: estimates. But no matter how you slice it, Sony is set to take a loss every time one of its silvery babies walks out of the store under someone's arm.

Now, it's accepted strategy that console makers initially sell their consoles at a loss in exchange for market share and recoup their expenses on the back end through licensing and games. It's the old "cheap razors, expensive razor blades" sales technique that's been used to sell everything from, well, razors to today's desktop photo printers—and, yes, the last generation of consoles, too. But there's also a certain point in the business curve where a company gives away too much to ever hope to get it back later. And it could be that the PS3 is on the wrong side of that curve....

...That is, if you believe that all Sony's trying to do with the PS3 is maintain its dominance in the console arena. Sony is certainly trying to do that, of course. But it's also using the PS3 to fight another very expensive battle: the battle for dominance in the next generation of DVDs.

Cast your mind back to the late '70s and early '80s, when there were two kinds of home videocassette formats: Betamax, which was backed by Sony, and VHS, developed by JVC and backed by other manufacturers. Betamax was the superior product, but VHS had sales momentum. Consumers and retailers—who didn't want the confusion of dealing with two separate video formats—eventually kicked Betamax to the curb. Today, the same standards battle is talking place for the next generation of DVDs, with Sony championing the Blu-ray format and other manufacturers (and Microsoft) getting behind the separate HD-DVD format. Sony doesn't want—and probably can't afford—to end up on the losing side of another video standards battle.

> SONY IS LOOKING TO KILL TWO BIRDS WITH ONE COSTLY STONE. IT COULD PAY OFF.

Enter the PS3. It's a game machine, yes—but it's equally a Blu-ray DVD player, and when the PS3 ships, it's also likely to be one of the cheapest next-gen DVD players on the market. It's not entirely out of the realm of possibility, in fact, that some people will buy a PS3 *primarily* as a next-gen DVD player, rather than as a game machine. Regardless of why people buy the PS3, Sony will, in relatively quick order, have millions of Blu-ray-capable machines hooked up to people's televisions all around the world.

With the PS2, the built-in DVD player was a bonus feature. In the PS3, it's one of the machine's core competencies. And it puts HD-DVD players (both the machines and the companies supporting it) at a disadvantage: Why pay for another next-gen DVD player when you've already got one in the house? Microsoft could level the playing field somewhat by releasing an HD-DVD add-on to the Xbox 360—but an add-on doesn't have the same potential to dominate the market as a Blu-ray DVD player baked right into the PS3.

Sony paying $400 dollars a machine to corner the next-generation gaming market? Expensive. Paying $400 a machine to corner the next-generation gaming market *and* the next-generation video market? Still expensive, but not stupidly so. Sony is looking to kill two birds with one costly stone. It could pay off.

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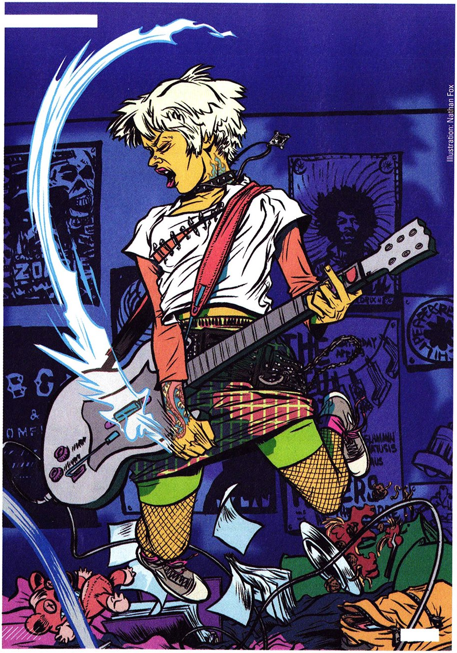

Illustration: Nathan Fox

ARE YOU READY TO ROCK?

GUITAR HERO'S ENCORE

RedOctane's guitar-rhythm game, *Guitar Hero*, is an intense experience. But after ripping through "Bark at the Moon" on expert, many were left wondering if the series would have additional games. After all, who wants to fork out all of that money for a guitar peripheral that can only be used for a single game? (Although we confess that even if that's all we get, it's so completely worth it.) Fortunately for our wallets, RedOctane CEO Kelly Sumner went on record with Europe's *MCV*, stating that there would be five or six games released in the *Guitar Hero* series between now and next year—and that *Guitar Hero 2* alone currently has about 40 tracks. Sumner also mentioned that different musical genres are a distinct possibility. While no specifics were given—aside from a mention of a rock-specific and country-specific version of the game—we can only hope that this will lead to some kind of *Banjo Hero* game. It was also noted that different features might be added to the guitar peripheral in the future. The only thing we can say is that none of these things can come fast enough.

PLAYSTATION BITS

BYTE-SIZED NEWS

Another day, another piece of legislation about videogames arrives for us to enjoy. This time, a U.S. Senate panel has approved legislation that would prevent games depicting the rape, torture, or killing of characters from being sold to minors. Given the track record of other, similar anti-violent-videogame legislation, this bill will probably get shot down in the courts.... Elsewhere, if you're a fan of the *Resident Evil* movies, guess what? A third movie is in the works, called *Resident Evil: Extinction*. It will once again star Milla Jovovich, who says that the script is really good. Yeah, right.... In other news, Midway has announced a ton of new projects for current- and next-generation systems, including *Mortal Kombat: Unchained* and *L.A. Rush* for the PSP, as well as *Unreal Tournament 2007* and *NBA Ballers* for PS3. Of particular note is *The Wheelman*, a combined production of MTV and Tigon Studios. Tigon is Vin Diesel's production house, so he'll be playing the part of the game's lead character. And as the title suggests, the focus will be on driving. Perhaps this may be the "real" sequel to *The Fast and the Furious* that everyone wanted.

WHAT'S IN YOUR PSP?

IT DOES MORE THAN PLAY GAMES

KUDO TSUNODA

executive producer for *Fight Night Round 3* and general manager at EA Sports Chicago

GAMES

"To me, there's only one game to play currently on the PSP—and that's *Fight Night Round 3*! I love the great multiplayer action!"

MOVIES

"Recently, it's been *Clerks*. Love the old Kevin Smith movies. Also, *Alien* and *Predator*, the classics."

MUSIC

"Almost all hip-hop. Some new, some old school: Wyclef Jean, Bumpy Knuckles, KRS-One, Cee-Lo, Ludacris, and Trick Daddy. Why am I listening to so much hip-hop? It's all about *Def Jam 3*!"

WEB

"A lot of videogame and sports sites, mostly!"

Tom Clancy's

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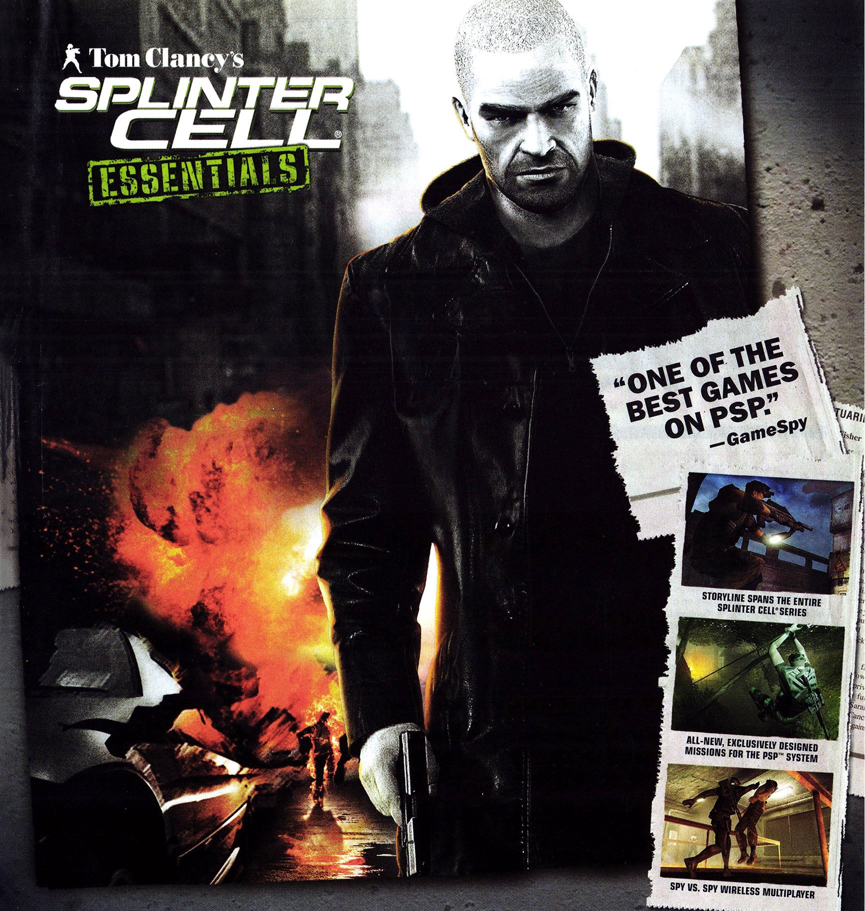
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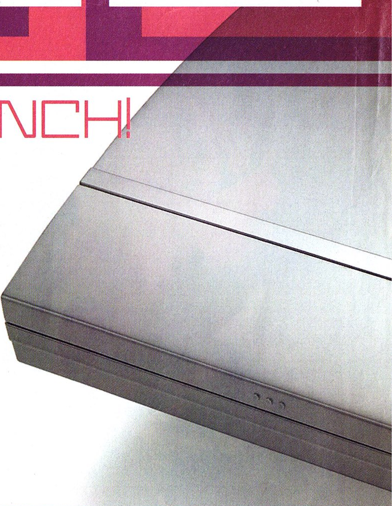
PS3 WATCH

LET'S DO LAUNCH!

March 15, 2006, Sony finally broke the curtain of silence that had descended after the unveiling of the PlayStation 3 at last year's E3 press conference. While the question of price has yet to be addressed, PlayStation father Ken Kutaragi did announce a lot of information about the launch period, online, and hardware fun. On these pages, we discuss both what Sony revealed and what that information could mean for potential buyers.



THE LAUNCH

YOU'LL HAVE MORE THAN TURKEY ON THANKSGIVING

WHAT SONY SAID

- The launch is scheduled for November 2006 in all territories (Japan, North America, and Europe).
- Launch games have yet to be confirmed.
- The initial delay from spring was caused by problems with Blu-ray technology and will allow for the latest HDMI technology.
- The target is a production capacity of 1 million units per month, with 6 million units produced by March 2007.

OUR TAKE

GIANCARLO So, November 2006—I can't say that I'm surprised. Even if Sony was capable of launching in the spring, I think it learned from the PSP launch that releasing a new system in that period isn't such a good idea since most publishers would wait for the holiday season to release their games anyway.

DANA And waiting till spring 2007—and giving Microsoft two holiday seasons to build its market lead—could have been suicidal.

JOE Yeah, it's not much of a surprise. I'm a bit disappointed; it sounds like it was out of Sony's hands, but I was really hoping to get my PS3 on sooner. But I suppose the bright side is that developers will have more time to polish the games. More games equals better launch.

SCOOTER For sure. I'd rather have a November launch with stuff like *Lair* and *Killzone* than a spring launch with a choice between *PS3 Pachinko* and *Kutaragi's Rage*.

GIANCARLO Well, I'm just wondering how much of this delay is really caused by Blu-ray and how much of it is simply not having enough games ready. I got the impression that a lot of PS3 games were much further along than we thought, but if final dev kits aren't going out until May, then maybe that's incorrect. Oh, and Scoot, you forgot *Super Happy Fun Time Explosion Rabbit*—I love that game.

DANA I think that gamewise, coming out a year after the first next-gen system launched will really help out the PS3's launch lineup. I mean, developers have had a chance to really start realizing what these systems are capable of, and almost every title that's been demoed on the Xbox 360 has "and other next-gen systems" attached to it.

JOE You know what kinda sucks? If Sony's talking about 1 million units a month, and it's doing a worldwide release...do you realize how unbelievably difficult it's going to be to get ahold of one?

SCOOTER That's why I'll preorder five and sell four on eBay. I can probably buy a helicopter from the proceeds.

DANA If you buy a helicopter, do you promise to leave?

GIANCARLO Oh, snap! Yeah, despite what Kutaragi says, supply is going to be a huge issue. I'm totally seeing people stomping over one another to get through the doors of Wal-Mart on the day after Thanksgiving—not unlike the great Cabbage Patch stampede of '88.

JOE There were a lot of unhappy children after the PS2 launch, and that was *after* the really hardcore had a chance to import one from Japan. Maybe it won't be such an issue, though—didn't Sony say that games at least would not be region coded?

SCOOTER That would be cool if games weren't region coded; I can then look forward to riding my helicopter and playing an imported copy of *Stringer's Sommelier Showdown* on Thanksgiving.

PS3 GOES ONLINE

SONY LETS LOOSE WITH ITS ONLINE PLANS

WHAT SONY SAID

- Online service will tentatively be called PlayStation Network Platform.
- Games can boot off the hard drive, making digital distribution possible.
- "Basic Service" is free and allows for online gaming (no details were given about a paid version of the service).
- Publishers can use their own servers or use servers that will be set up by Sony Online Entertainment; this should allow for a more open infrastructure.
- There will be a universal login similar to what Xbox Live uses.
- The service will allow for voice and video chat, messaging, matchmaking, and rankings.
- Players will be able to upload and download game data.
- Content downloads will be available, and micropayment transactions were mentioned.
- The PS3 will offer full Internet access and server capabilities.

OUR TAKE

GIANCARLO So, publishers can use their own servers if they want to, but SOE will also be providing servers in case developers want to take the easy way out, so to speak. This could be really good for people who want a game like *World of WarCraft* on PS3, since Blizzard said it didn't particularly care for the Xbox Live system of online.

JOE It sounds like the best of both worlds. The *SOCOM* guys have expressed that they consider the Live model too restrictive; this may just be the happiest medium. I mean, you put in a framework for all the community stuff but leave the game stuff up to the developers, and you might just make everyone happy.

DANA Everyone happy? What a crazy concept! Maybe Sony could offer to help out the UN if that's actually the case. It does sound like an ideal sort of situation, though. I'm going to be very interested to see the interface that the company comes up with. I'm wondering if Sony worked with SOE on that as well, since SOE has so much experience in online gaming.

SCOOTER I just want standardized voice chat to be built in to every online game (à la Xbox Live) so that I can sing songs and recite poems while we shoot terrorists together.

DANA No—no singing!

JOE I think it's undeniable that the PS3 *needs* a standardized online platform—singing morons, foul-mouthed children, and all. Live is one of the biggest draws for the Xbox, and with that example out there, I think Sony would look hopelessly out of date if it failed to provide a comparable service.

GIANCARLO I agree. I'm just glad that Sony didn't balk at the idea of Xbox Live, but instead, looked at its strengths as well as its weaknesses and moved on from there. Now it needs to just come up with a better name for the service. How about PS3 More Live-r or even PS3 OMG?

DANA Maybe we can come up with our own version of what PNP stands for. "PlayStation Neato Phuntime!"

JOE Just please, for the love of all that is holy, set it up so that we have *one* username and *one* password and *one* buddy list. My brain isn't big enough to hold more than that.

SCOOTER I alleviate the multiple login/password debacle by making every username a variation of "Scootacular!" and every password a variation of "Bigheadrybicki."

THE HARD DRIVE

WILL IT OR WON'T IT?

WHAT SONY SAID

- There will be a 2.5-inch hard drive for the PlayStation 3, although it is not known yet whether it will be built in or sold as an add-on.
- The hard drive has a planned 60GB capacity that is slated to be upgradeable and will come with Linux preinstalled.
- Kutaragi said that game developers are being told that "HDD is required."

OUR TAKE

GIANCARLO Well, I think it's great that Sony wants to push the hard drive. The company certainly missed that opportunity with the PS2, but it's already sort of made a mistake by not just coming out and saying, "The hard drive will definitely be included."

JOE I wonder if Sony is just being overly cautious with the wording. If it's telling developers to develop with the HDD in mind, I think it's a fairly safe assumption that the HDD will be there. I just hope it's standard and not optional. The PS2 HDD showed us the folly of that.

DANA Yes—hard drives that aren't built in directly run the risk of becoming optional peripherals. Having it built directly in would really help Sony push the new online service, too—being able to download maps, new game content. Which also will put more money in Sony's and other publishers' pockets. It seems silly not to have something built in.

SCOOTER Hopefully, Sony has learned from Microsoft's folly in releasing the woefully inadequate Xbox 360 core pack. Also, I like the idea of a 60GB HD (over Xbox 360's 20GB drive), just so I can store more *Final Fantasy* fan art on it.

GIANCARLO That's what you call it, eh? "*Final Fantasy* fan art," indeed.... Anyway, I'm a little concerned that 60GB is overdoing it, especially if the price of the system is going to exceed $400. I don't have that kind of scratch, so I'd prefer if Sony went a little smaller and maybe gave the option of upgrading later.

JOE I'm not so sure it'd make that much of a difference; 60GB hard drives are dirt cheap these days. I think they give them out with extra-value meals at Wendy's.

SCOOTER Didn't Kutaragi say that he wants people to work extra days to get the scrilla needed to buy a PS3? Anyhow, like Joe said, I don't see 60 gigs being too costly. I can go buy a 200-gigger for, like, $12 right now.

DANA Maybe it's more expensive with the hard drive because of how much heavier it gets, since all the stock boys are more likely to drop and break them. So, what do you guys think the price is going to end up being? My prediction: If the 60GB hard drive is built in, it's going to be $500-plus.

JOE No way it's going be more than $500. That would just be ludicrous; in fact, I'll be surprised if it's more than $400. Consoles have always been loss leaders, and I don't see this one being any different; I bet Sony's willing to take a bath on this to keep the price down. Remember that it's not just going to be a game system, but a platform to help get people downloading content off Connect.

DANA Plus, Sony needs to get people hooked on Blu-ray if it wants to avoid another Betamax situation.

GIANCARLO That's true. It sounds like Sony is serious about making the PS3 the center of everything. I just hope it makes French toast, too.

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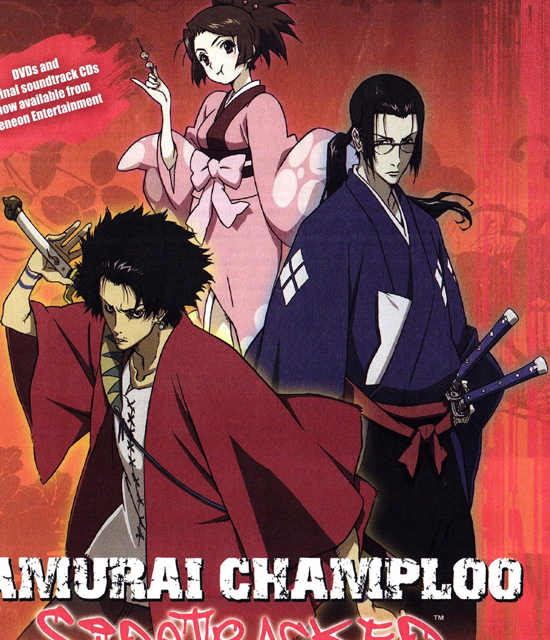

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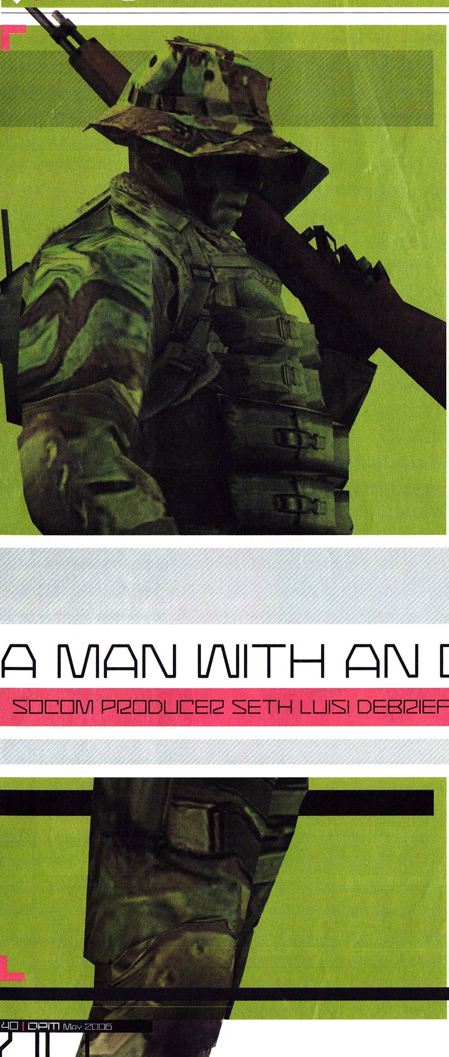
A MAN WITH AN ONLINE PLAN

SOCOM PRODUCER SETH LUISI DEBRIEFS ONLINE PLAY FOR THE PS2



Seth Luisi may not be as well known as some other high-profile developers out there, but he should be. As a senior producer at Sony Computer Entertainment America, Luisi and the team at Zipper Interactive are among the few that have made the PS2's online capabilities a genuine success despite all the pitfalls the console has faced over the years. So what's the secret?

OPM Why has *SOCOM* been such a hit online? Why do you think the game's been such a hit in general?

SETH LUISI It really comes down to a lot of hard work. We made online a really big feature for us, and we wanted to be really aggressive about how we pursued it. So rather than waiting around for the online features to be developed, I really was looking at spearheading it and coming out with a really competitive online experience. From the first *SOCOM* game, I wanted to be able to play with 16 players. I wanted to have persistent game lobbies, persistent games, and persistent environments. I wanted to really focus on the teamplay. Actually, we had to go through a lot to get voice chat in the game; that was a big challenge. In fact, at the beginning, I was going out and meeting with different headset manufacturers, just looking at who could manufacture the USB headset for me so that we could get voice chat in the game.

So, it was a goal of Zipper Interactive's and mine to really present the best possible online solution that we could. We didn't leave it as a second feature or a secondary goal. We're really not just competitive with other PlayStation 2 games, but competitive with other online games in general.

OPM Is there a secret within the online formula itself that has made it work so well?

SL I'm always a big proponent of persistence. So that was one of the big things for me going into it. I wanted to make it really easy for people to see these persistent games and these persistent lobbies and know that they can meet their friends in a U.S. East Medley game. And they can go back there, and they can tell their friends that's where they want to meet them. And you start to see different communities form up. I think it really paid off and worked just as well as I had expected. When we released *SOCOM II*, we did a launch event at the Sony Metreon [in San Francisco], and there were people going up and down the line saying, "U.S. East 15! Who else here plays in U.S. East 15?"

And that was the exact goal that I was shooting for—to create that sense of community, that persistent place where people could come back to. And to me, when I play Xbox Live, that's one of the things that sort of detracts from that experience, because it's so temporary. You're really not building on the community. Your community is just your friends list. Well, your friends list is a small number of people. You don't really have that persistence.

OPM So you feel that the open model that Sony has for online has ultimately been better for a game like *SOCOM*, as opposed to something like Xbox Live or a closed network?

| SL I can definitely say it was better for us because when I looked at all the features that I wanted to do, a lot of them I wouldn't have been able to do on Xbox Live. Xbox Live is a great service, but it's really limited. You know, if you want to have your game Xbox Live–enabled, you have to do it a certain way; you have to support certain features in a very specific manner. And one of the things I really don't like about [Xbox Live] is the matchmaking. It's good because it gets you into a game pretty fast, but again, it just sort of lacks that persistence and that community aspect.

We were also able, with the *SOCOM* games, to really keep adding the community features and keep adding on to the community. We were able to get clan support in the first game and then build upon that in the second game. And then in the third game, of course, we're adding in message boards, mail, and everything else. We were really able to add on all these additional features just on our own. [But] if we were doing an Xbox Live game, we would have had to wait for Microsoft to add those features. So it's a very different scenario.

| OPM What's been the biggest hurdle for online play, and *SOCOM* specifically?

| SL To us, it's been cheating. Detecting cheaters [and] preventing cheaters has been one of the biggest challenges. [And another challenge is] just really reacting to the community. I don't think we do community management in *SOCOM* very well, and that's something I'm really starting to focus on now and trying to improve. But it's hard to convince other people that we actually need people to manage it. We have this huge *SOCOM* community, but if you leave them on their own, they're all just going sit around complaining about the game.

So cheating, reacting to the consumers, and trying to be responsive to the community are some of the biggest challenges for us. Implementing specific features was difficult, but at least it was sort of a known factor. We knew in *SOCOM 3* that we could get to 32 players. It [was going to] be hard work to do it, but we knew we could get there.

| OPM A new map pack is being made available for *SOCOM 3* for $5.99. Is this the model for all online games—these microtransactions—that's going to help keep them fresh?

| SL That's certainly a goal. There are a lot of challenges with creating the content [and] valuing the content, how much it's worth. And there isn't really a set value. And in fact, a lot of the downloadable content that's been released just hasn't [been valued properly]—I guess you could use Microsoft as a perfect example. They released a *Halo* map pack for $6. And then, three months later, they gave the maps away for free. So what's to encourage those *Halo* users to buy [something like] that again, if they kind of got ripped off? Because they paid six bucks, but if they would've waited three months, then they could've gotten it for free.

So there's been a lot of confusion in the pricing of the content and the value of the content. That's one of the biggest challenges, and that's one of the biggest things we're trying to say: This content does cost us money to make. We want to get it out there to the consumers, but it's just not financially feasible to have a team working on content without funding coming in for that content. It's definitely a new business model to try to find some way to make money off it. So I think it's a great way of adding on to the game and keeping the game going, keeping the community going. But certainly, it's going to be challenging to make it work right.

| OPM How important would you say online, in general, is to console gaming?

| SL I think it's very important. I think, to me, we've really just touched the tip of the iceberg here as far as online gaming. You still don't see a lot of variety in games that are played online. There's so much potential to do so many [different types of] games online. We're just doing a couple of genres online, and then all the rest of the types of games, we're just excluding. You know, "That really can't be done online." So to me, there's a lot more potential in having online experiences and types of games that people don't really think about now.

Also, I think we need to look at broadening online beyond just shooters, RPGs, and racing games, which is pretty much all there is right now. So we're covering three genres in online games—and I guess the other one would be the "virtual world" genre. So there's so much more that can be done, so many more different types of game experiences that can be offered. Online is really still in its infancy. There are going to be a lot more unique uses of online coming in the future.

| OPM In what direction do you think it's heading? Are we heading more toward totally persistent worlds, or are we heading more toward "jump in and play, then jump out" kinds of experiences?

| SL Kind of hard to say. I think that, again, to me, some of the more interesting online aspects are the ones where they aren't directly associated with going online. [Experiences where] you can have more of an online "influence" in games that you're playing rather than an online "mode." So that's kind of what I'm really interested in, going forward: How do you have the fact that you're connected with all these other players influence the game that you're playing, rather than it being competitive? You know, there's been some talk of that in games like *Spore*. And to some extent, *Animal Crossing* does that as well, where you can go and visit other people's little "villages." But that concept can really be applicable to lots of different types of games, where you can have sort of more "interactive" gaming experience because you're connected online.

| OPM If you could change anything about the way that Sony approached online for the PlayStation 2, what would it be? And how does the hard drive fit into all of this?

| SL We did use the hard drive; we released the maps. We had much bigger plans for the hard drive, but there was just the issue of how to get content to the hard drive, [which] was never really worked out in a satisfactory manner, so it wasn't really worth it for us to continue to develop for the HDD. But to me, if you're going back to, like, what is something Sony could have done differently for online and not really related to the hard drive, I've always been a proponent, from day one, since we first started working on *SOCOM*, of just having a basic unified login and friends list. It's something that is extremely beneficial. It's really difficult to manage the communities and manage the people if they can just create an alternate persona at any time and just create an unlimited number of accounts. Then they sort of lose persistence across the service. To me, that's always been the biggest issue that I've had: We [haven't had a] unified login and friends list.

> "WE'RE LOOKING TO DO A PRETTY DRASTIC DEPARTURE FROM THE CURRENT GAME."

| OPM Given what you just said, is that ideally what you would want for the PS3's online capabilities?

| SL I wouldn't go so far as to say I would want full online API [application program interface], which is what Xbox Live provides. But certainly, some basic features of universal login, friends list, and certain things like that definitely make sense for an online service. And then, having some different communication features going between that. To me, that's the biggest element that PlayStation 2 online was missing. Well, I should correct that, because certainly with PlayStation 2, there were a lot of just—I hate to say it—poor online games or games that were kind of embarrassing.

| OPM What would you say is the next big step that you see for the *SOCOM* series?

| SL Well, I can't go into too much detail there. With our game on the next generation, we're looking to do a pretty drastic departure from the current game. So I can't really go into too much detail, because I don't want to give anything away too early. But it is going to be pretty different from what we have now. Like I said, I always have so many ideas for different things that I want to do with the game, the game experience, and the direction of the game. There's never a lack of ideas. A lot of people are starting to ask me, "You've done three *SOCOM* games! Aren't you tired of doing *SOCOM* games?" You know, I still have all these ideas I want to do! We're always limited in how much time we have and how many resources we get to do this. There's still so much more! This is just a fraction of what we really wanted to accomplish. I think we've made some good games, but we still have tons of ideas for things that we want to do. |

SOCOM 4

We're intrigued by what Zipper Interactive and Sony may end up doing with their next-generation *SOCOM* game. Hopefully, it will include more delicious online play.

MAY 06

THE MONTH AHEAD FOR YOU AND YOUR PLAYSTATION

SUNDAY

07

Cough, cough. Today we're observing **National Revise Your Work Schedule Month** by calling in sick until June.

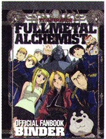
14

Those *OPM* staffers who came from **mothers** will appreciate them today. This excludes editor-in-chief Tom Byron, who is a clone of Drew Carey.

MONDAY

01

Action-film director and *Stranglehold* writer **John Woo** is 60 years old.



08

Huzzah for birthing! That's what *Fullmetal Alchemist* creator **Hiromu Arakawa** is thinking today.

29

Is there a better way to **Memorialize** than by firing up your favorite WWII shooter? Not as far as we're concerned.

TUESDAY

NEW GAMES

02

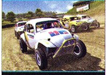
Some advice for Jamie Foxx: Go buy ***Hitman: Blood Money*** to find out what good *Stealth* looks like.

16

We'd say ***Dance Factory*** was coming out today, but then that would just be an obvious ploy to fill some empty space.

23

If you like robots and you like *GTA*, go crazy with ***Steambot Chronicles.***

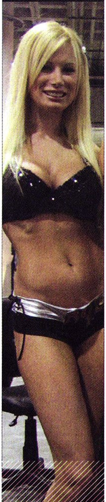


30

Bulk up your PSP library with ***Monster Hunter Freedom*** and ***TOCA Race Driver 2006.***

NEW GAMES

WEDNESDAY



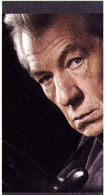
10

Booth babes start handing out deodorant samples as gaming's single-biggest event begins.

THURSDAY

04

Cover your ears: Star Wars nerds across the globe will be saying, "**May the fourth** be with you."

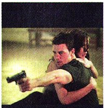


25

Ian McKellan—who you know better as Magneto—celebrates his birthday today and anticipates the release of ***X-Men: The Last Stand*** tomorrow.

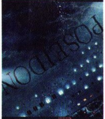
FRIDAY

NEW FLICKS



05

Is it coincidence that movie producer Tom Cruise chose **No Pants Day** as the release date for ***Mission: Impossible III***? We didn't think so, either.



12

Just like *Titanic,* but not as cheerful: ***Poseidon*** opens in theaters.

19

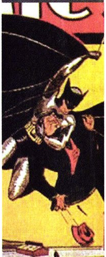
The Da Vinci Code, or as we call it, "the movie starring a greasy-haired Tom Hanks that's based on the crappy book," comes out.

NEW FLICKS

SATURDAY

13

Calling all morons: Be extra incompetent. It's **Blame Someone Else Day!**



27

Bruce Wayne's alter ego debuted 67 years ago in Detective Comics #27.

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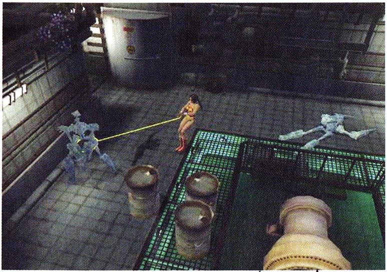
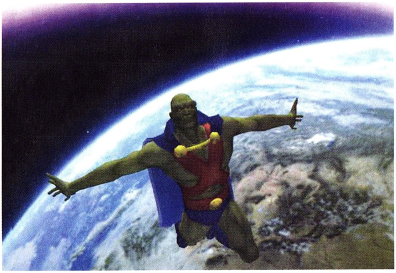
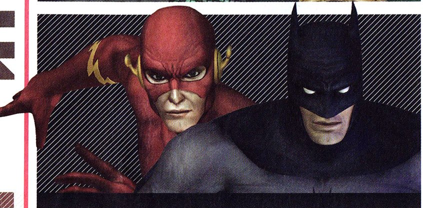
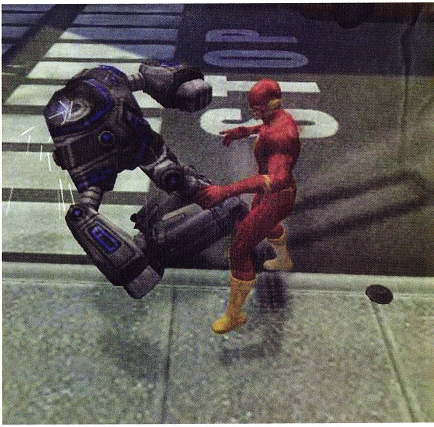








PUB. Warner Bros IE DEV. Snowblind Studios RELEASE Fall

JUSTICE LEAGUE HEROES

JUSTICE FOR ALL

NOT NORRATH WITH TIGHTS

After making three solid action-RPGs that were stuffed with elves, barbarians, and much swinging of swords, the folks at Snowblind Studios decided to try something else for a change: making a superhero action-RPG. One of their initial design decisions? Superheroes don't quaff health potions.

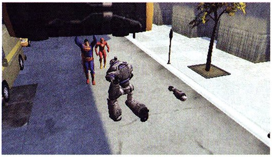
"You never see Superman take a moment to swig down a red or blue potion," elaborated project manager Loren Bryant. To that end, the superheroes' health automatically recharges when they're out of combat, à la the energy shield in *Halo*. That's one of many superhero-based design decisions in *Justice League Heroes*. Associate producer Jason Ades emphasizes that the game is supposed to make you feel as if you're controlling some of the most iconic and powerful superheroes in the world—not just playing another fantasy action-RPG with a quick face-lift.

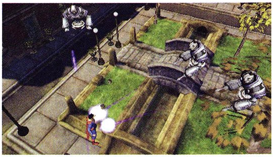
With the success of the *X-Men Legends* franchise, it makes sense for DC Comics to have a similar game for its team of heavy hitters. Yet, with all due respect to the X-Men, the Justice League is filled with icons like Superman, Batman, Green Lantern, and the Flash. Add Wonder Woman, Martian Manhunter, and Zatanna (no slouches themselves) to the mix, and you have the seven core playable characters in *JLH* (you can play two at a time, with either an AI partner or a real-life buddy on your couch).

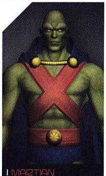
Because you're playing as superheroes with innate abilities, you won't find yourself picking up +3 Halberds off enemies or deciding whether to equip the Ax of Reconciliation or Dirk of Iniquity. You have your basic, yet mighty, powers off the bat. "We want players to enter the game and immediately feel powerful," Ades says. Start the first area as Superman, and you can pick up and toss cars or zap robots with your heat vision (and yes, you can fly). When you play as the Flash, you

PORTABLE SUPERPOWER

Don't be surprised by the appearance of a PSP version of *Justice League Heroes.* We got these first screens of the game up and running on the PSP—but, at the moment, that's about it. At press time, Snowblind was finalizing exactly how different the PSP version will be from the PS2 version, and while we saw a pretty straightforward port, Snowblind could easily decide to base the PSP version on the Superfriends instead of the Justice League.

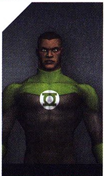






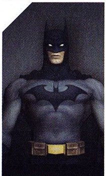
MARTIAN MANHUNTER

His powerful Martian mind translates into a strong psi-blast ability, and he can phase-shift, which allows him to slip through solid objects à la the Flash. Except some other powers based on his Martian shape-shifting skills.



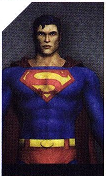
GREEN LANTERN

Since this Green Lantern is John Stewart, expect traditional, utilitarian use of his power ring. His powers will most likely allow him to make energy blasts and shields, and occasionally grab a guy.



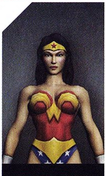
BATMAN

Just because he's human doesn't mean he can't kick ass. His martial-arts skills allow for plenty of critical strikes in melee combat, and he's got crazy gadgets like batarangs and flashbangs. Alas, he doesn't really fly; he more "glides around."



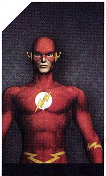
SUPERMAN

Big Red has his usual array of powers like heat vision, freezing breath, a "forceful blow" (he puts his lips together, and—whoosh!—there go the bad guys), superstrength, and natural flight.



WONDER WOMAN

She's strong and flighty like our buddy Supes, but she also has some lasso-specific skills, like snagging guys and either paralyzing or throwing them. And of course, she can deflect bullets with her wristbands.



THE FLASH

Our favorite speedster, Wally West, has some pretty cool moves. Besides regular superspeed, he can vibrate himself through most obstacles, continually stay behind an opponent and hit weak spots, and create minitornadoes. He can't fly. But, then again, he doesn't really need to.

ZATANNA

A slick magician with "Vegas-show-inspired" powers. She can do things like turn baddies into rabbits (harmless, and with reduced hit points!), make duplicates of herself to help during brawling, freeze time, and whip up a protection spell for herself and her partner.

don't have to wait until you ding level 12 before you can run circles around your enemies. Not only can you flex your powers on the baddies, but you can exercise all of them on the destructible terrain as well. "With great power comes great collateral damage," quips Ades.

So what do you do when Green Lantern hits level 7? Well, as you level up, you can modify your powers. You tweak attributes like range, accuracy, and damage—for example, you can make Superman's heat vision a short, focused beam that delivers tons of damage, or you can have it ping your target from very far away but with lower damage. You do this by applying "boosts" (which you can collect from enemies) to your powers—an element inspired by the PC superhero MMORPG *City of Heroes*. These powers, and their boosts, serve as the skills/weapons/character-development portion of the game.

In keeping with the epic theme, *JLH*'s story spans 11 episodes, with an accompanying array of locales and villains. Scripted by Dwayne McDuffie (editor and writer of the *Justice League Unlimited* show on Cartoon Network), the plot bounces around from downtown Metropolis to a White Martian invasion fleet hovering over Earth to even an alternate dimension. The development team is saving info about specific villains and bosses, but it's safe to assume that biggies like Lex Luthor and Brainiac will be antagonists in the game. Heck, don't be surprised if Gorilla Grodd (a superintelligent telepathic gorilla who lives in a hidden city of talking gorillas called, er, Gorilla City—trust us, he's a pretty cool villain!) makes an appearance.

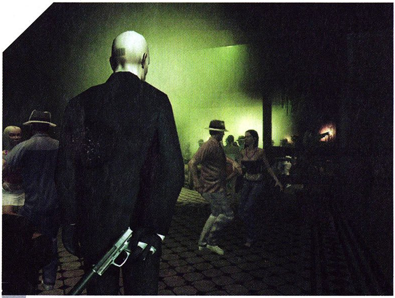
Even though we haven't had a chance to play the game ourselves, we're optimistic, due largely to how Snowblind is approaching this as a superhero game that happens to be an action-RPG, rather than as an action-RPG with superhero tights. |

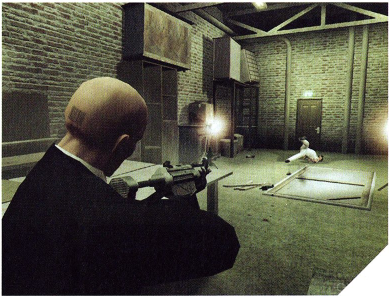
PUB. Eidos DEV. IO Interactive RELEASE May

HITMAN

BLOOD MONEY

THE SEVEN HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE HIT MEN





There are many different types of jobs. Attorney. Barista. Zookeeper. Hit man. But no matter your chosen calling, it's important to be the best you can be. Agent 47 has been honing his craft for quite some time, but he didn't become the efficient killing machine that we know and love without acquiring some productive habits first. Luckily, he was willing to share them with us.

1. BE PROACTIVE

"I always hide the bodies after killing people, even if no one's around. After all, why risk trouble if you don't need to? Fortunately, in this crazy world in which we live, there are always plenty of containers available. Even the abandoned offices of the amusement park where I knocked off a few security guards who unfortunately got in my way have big bins that can house a body quite nicely."

2. BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

"The paycheck comes when the job's done. But the more people I kill, the more likely people will start to recognize me—which means that I'll have to use my earnings to buy a new identity instead of getting better gear. Whenever I start a new job, I focus on my primary targets and try and harm as few people as necessary to get to them. Even paid assassins don't like to have too many skeletons in their closets."

3. PUT FIRST THINGS FIRST

"Being a hit man is very physically demanding, and you've got to be in tip-top condition to do the job well. It's hard to react quickly and dodge those who'd do you harm if you're leaking buckets of blood. After all, this is real life—it's not like you're in a videogame where a first-aid kit can cure deathly injuries at the touch of a button. Remember: If you haven't got your health, you haven't got anything."

4. THINK WIN-WIN

"Even if things don't go exactly according to plan, don't give up—there's more than one way to skin a cat...or person. If things get out of hand, try and get to a quiet place and recoup. Study the map, check out where your targets and exits are, and take stock of your weaponry. It's never over till you're dead."

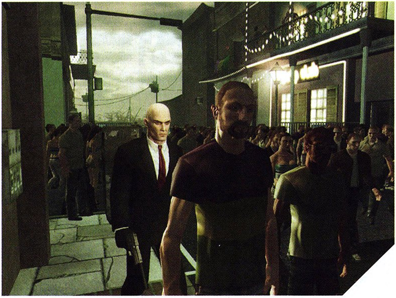
5. SEEK FIRST TO UNDERSTAND, THEN TO BE UNDERSTOOD

"One of the biggest keys to success is knowing the situation well. Study the mission briefing when you get it, and thoroughly

Io-Interactive

Io-Interactive

Io-Interactive



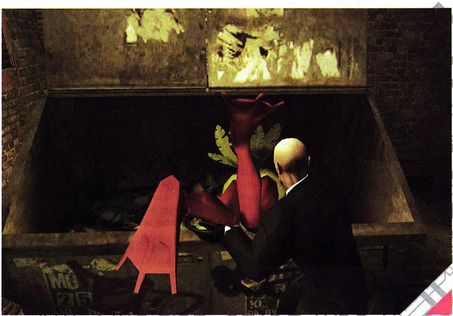
familiarize yourself with the targets. Sometimes those briefings will provide clues as to the most efficient way to get rid of your victims. For example, one time I had to kill a world-famous opera tenor—it was so easy to time the murder with the gunshot scheduled for the third act...."

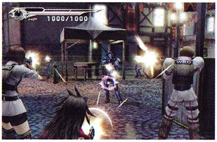
6. SYNERGIZE

"People are less suspicious if they think you're one of them, and it's a lot easier to blend into the crowd if you've got on the right outfit—even if the right outfit stands out. One time, I snuck into a target's house by killing a clown scheduled to perform at his kid's birthday party. Then I put on the clown suit myself. I'll tell you something—that guy sure was surprised when I pulled out a syringe instead of a balloon animal."

7. SHARPEN THE SAW

"Or hot-wire the hot plate. Or drop the barbell. There are lots of different ways to kill people. But if I make it look accidental, people won't even think to look for someone to blame. For example, this one time in Chile, I ran across a guard leaning on a railing overlooking a steep cliff. When his body was discovered after it fell over the railing, people just assumed he'd gotten drunk—no one even noticed me sneaking away."

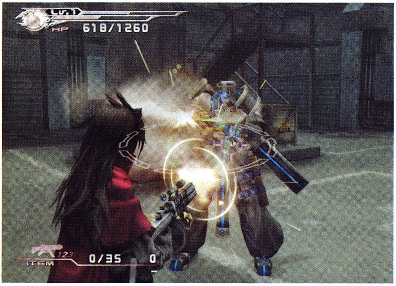


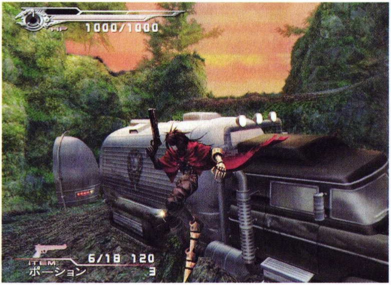


PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE August

DIRGE OF CERBERUS

OUR COUSIN VINNIE





Squenix knows that everyone and their grandmother's mailman's cousin is a big fan of *Final Fantasy VII*, which is probably why the company is using that game as a launchpad for some weird side projects. Hence the presence of *FFVII: Advent Children*, the still-mysterious *Crisis Core*, the *Before Crisis* cell phone game, and now, *Dirge of Cerberus*. While Squenix has experimented with action titles such as *Einhander*, the *Musashi* series, and, er, *The Bouncer*, it hasn't tried dipping into either the first-person shooter or third-person action genres, and it makes sense to make a first/third-person hybrid shooter with Vincent, the *FFVII* fellow with the big gun and a nice, flowy cape for extra intrigue.

Dirge director Yoshinori Kitase (who also directed *FFVII* and was a big part of *FFVIII*, *FFX*, and *FFX-2*) has talked publicly about his fondness for first-person shooters, and *Dirge* looks like an attempt to create his own shooter—one that is on top of a *Devil May Cry*–style action title.

Storywise, *Dirge* supposedly takes place sometime after the events of *FFVII: Advent Children*. What we know of a plot so far is that after a nice fan-service appearance by Yuffie (who has apparently partnered up with Vincent), some bad business goes down, and Vincent is on his own fighting weird dudes and their even weirder robo-dogs. As expected, the graphics (both in the game and in the cinemas) have that inimitable Squenix flair.

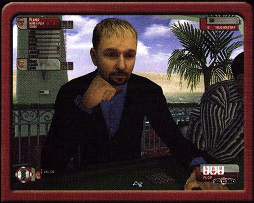
Playing as Vincent, you zip around in third person and can do all sorts of crazy combo moves for melee combat. However, since many of the baddies are either far off or heavily armored, you'll want to start using guns instead; you can aim in either over-the-shoulder mode (à la *RE4* and *Tomb Raider: Legend*) or first-person mode. Additionally, if you're a *FFVII* fan who plainly sucks at action games, there's a helpful autoaim mode—as long as your target is within a generously large reticule, you'll hit them.

Dirge is already out in Japan, and most gamers there comment on its quirky control scheme (apparently, both horizontal and vertical aiming are inverted) and the somewhat simplistic gameplay and level design. Here's hoping that Squenix tweaks the game a little before it crosses the Pacific.

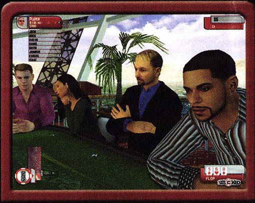
POKER. RAISED.

STACKED™

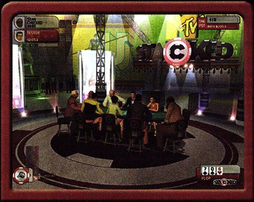
WITH DANIEL NEGREANU



1. Raise your game with tips from Player of the Year Daniel Negreanu



2. Test your skill against the world's best learning No Limit Hold'em A.I.



3. Go online and prove yourself in massive multi-table tournaments

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TEEN

Crude Humor
Mild Language
Simulated Gambling

CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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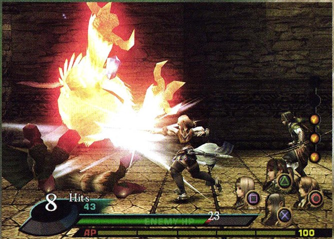
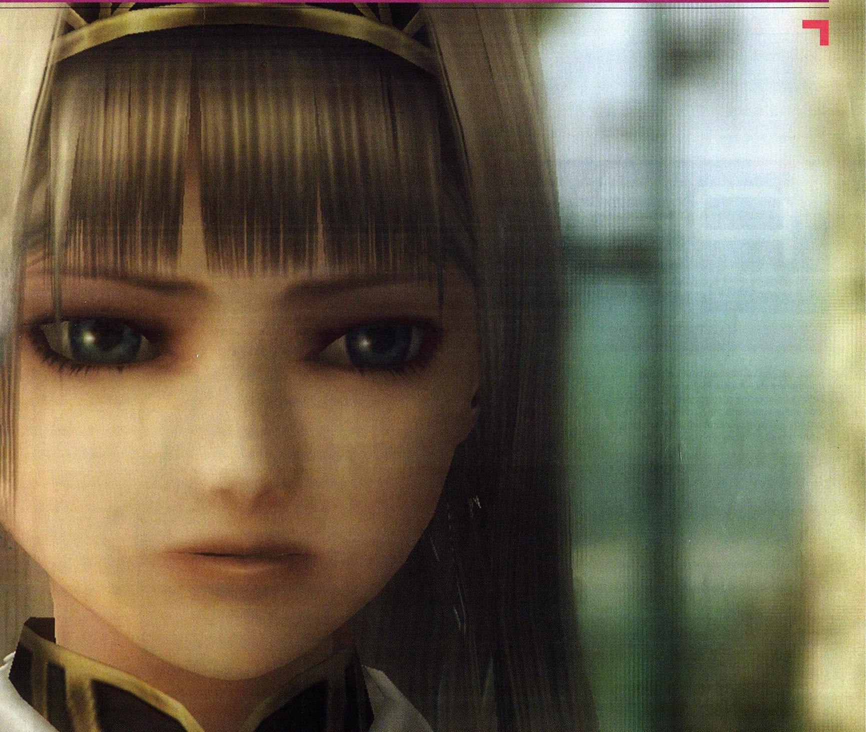
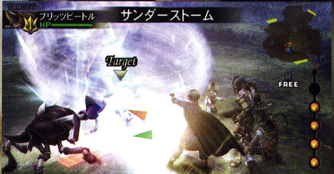
VALKYRIE PROFILE: SILMERIA

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Square Enix RELEASE June 2006

One of the benefits of the Square Enix union is that the combined RPG powerhouse can develop new games *and* revive older classics. One such classic, *Valkyrie Profile*, published in 2000 for the PS1 under the Enix label, proved just enough of a critical and financial hit to deserve a sequel—or prequel, as happens to be the case with *Valkyrie Profile: Silmeria* for the PS2 (a PSP version, *Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth*, is also in the works; see page 70). Set in the original *Valkyrie Profile* world, *Silmeria* takes place a few hundred years before the first game's events in the city of Dipan, which is now an intact and prospering realm. You'll play two characters, Silmeria (a Valkyrie and the younger sister of Lenneth) and Alisha (princess of Dipan), who have been trapped in one body as punishment for angering the god Odin. Expect some fun interconnectivity between the PS2 and PSP versions. |






TARGET
ブリッツビートル
HP
サンダーストーム
Target
FREE
4 Hits
ALICIA 109
DYLAN 124
RUFUS 111
LEZARD 90
HP
AP
48

Fan service

The original *Valkyrie Profile* may have been obscure, but it was still a great game, which is why we're thrilled that Squenix is doing both this prequel and a separate remake.

PSPARTY!: PSP TURNS 1 YEAR OLD

Break out the candles and put on those ridiculous hats—it's the PSP's birthday. *OPM* is celebrating the first year by taking a look at the successes (and stumbles) of the system, as well as examining the promising future ahead for Sony's portable dynamo.

UNITS SOLD IN WEEK ONE:

500,000

(1,000,000 SOLD IN SIX WEEKS)

PSPAST

THE LAUNCH

IN LIKE A LION

On March 24, 2005, Sony made its first foray into the world of handheld gaming with the PlayStation Portable—a device that, by all accounts, was going to elevate handheld gaming to a new level, previously unattainable even by the likes of Nintendo and its Game Boy hardware. It was also eagerly anticipated by consumers just waiting to get their hands on this new technology. After all, not only would the system have Wi-Fi capabilities and the hardware to handle amazing-looking games, but it would also be able to play music and movies. Sony's own anticipation for the launch seems to have been met with some trepidation. "This company has been so successful that, to some degree, we're a victim of our own success," says Jack Tretton, vice president and co-COO of Sony Computer Entertainment America. "When I look back to the launch of the original PlayStation in 1995, we were obviously optimistic and thought demand would be strong. When we went into the launch of the PlayStation 2, we went from being the new kid on the block to the established leader, so there was a tremendous amount of anticipation that was built up."

Looking back, Tretton saw the same buildup for the PSP. "[We generated] a tremendous amount of interest for the PSP, despite the fact that nobody had heard of the [system] more than a year before it hit the shelves," he says. "It came on the scene quickly, and we didn't say a whole lot about it after the announcement. [It wasn't until] after E3, at CES, that we went into more detail. So it kind of snuck up on the consumer and the third-party community."

Still, Sony was proud of what the PSP was able to accomplish, given the fact that it almost seemed like the system was rushed to market. "Even with the limited amount of time the development community had their hands on PSP tools, we still had the largest launch game library of any platform," Tretton says. "I thought it was great that we were targeting a half-million units for launch and that we ended up delivering a million units available on day one. Also, it was the first time that we, as a gaming company, touted a device that had multimedia capabilities that went far beyond gaming. And as we head into the PSP's first anniversary, there's no shortage of [companies] wanting to support the other multimedia features of the PSP."

Still, as great as the launch was for Sony, the summer months proved to be a difficult period due to a lack of gaming software, which contributed to a general lack of interest amongst consumers.

"What's painfully apparent with every platform is that everyone kills each other and steps over themselves to get launch titles out there, and once you get that first wave out there—especially if you're talking about summertime—people are geared for the holiday time frame," Tretton says. "In terms of timing for software support, if you have a spring launch and your first holiday season is coming up six months later, it's just natural that the development community aims for two windows—the launch window and the holiday time frame.... There were only so many titles in development to begin with."

> "TO SOME DEGREE, WE'RE A VICTIM OF OUR OWN SUCCESS."

It was a rough period for the PSP, but as the months marched on, more and more games slowly made it to the market, resulting in a second wind of hype that should help drive sales of the PSP through the coming months. "In the PSP registration information that we get back from consumers, three-fourths of them had heard about the PSP from friends and people raving about how great the PSP was," Tretton says. "You can spend a lot on an ad campaign, but ultimately, it's the consumer who's going to spread the word on how great the device is. Those first million [buyers] out there were our first million evangelists."

LAUNCH NUMBERS

Units shipped:
1 million

Units sold in week one:
500,000 (1,000,000 sold in six weeks)

Games available at launch:
24

Average age of launch-day consumer:
28

MONEY GENERATED THROUGH UNIT SALES:

1.6 BILLION

PSPRESENT

KEEPING THE MOMENTUM

HOW THE PSP HAS GAINED STEAM

With sales steadily picking back up after a slump in the summer of 2005, the PSP seems to be starting to hits its stride. And thanks to development support ramping up, that trend appears on track to continue. So what's made the PSP such an interesting prospect for developers and publishers as of late? Sony CEA vice president and co-COO Jack Tretton answers: "There are a number of reasons. The first thing is that if you put the technology in the developers' hands, it allows them to do a sophisticated, consolelike game for the first time. Because of the technical limitations of portable machines in the past, you couldn't build the type of game [that] I think the development community gets excited about building. The PSP [lets them take] a great iteration of *GTA* and put it out on the system and have it be as robust as the console experience. You can do that with a *SOCOM*. You can do that with sports games for the first time and have the depth in a baseball game that you didn't really have [on portable systems in the past]."

Indeed, it seems as though it's going to take a little extra time to totally train developers to use the PSP in a way that differs from what's traditionally considered "handheld gaming."

"Because of technical limitations, developers built simpler games intended for a younger audience. So this is the first time that the game machine has the capability of supporting games that they'd like to develop," Tretton says. "More importantly, they were able to come up with games that appeal to a more diverse audience, as opposed to just kids—or the same demographic that the console appeals to."

> THE PSP OFFERS AN OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE CONSOLE-QUALITY EXPERIENCES.

The other reason the PSP seems to have reached a turning point isn't really because of the PSP at all. Instead, it has more to do with the looming arrival of the PlayStation 3 and the next generation of consoles. Development costs for these consoles are already on the rise, and they'll continue to grow as games become more complex. The PSP offers an opportunity for developers to create console-quality

YEAR-ONE FACTS

- Movies are the second-biggest driver behind games for older consumers and females
- Music is considered the second-most-important feature of the PSP
- 71 percent purchased the system as a gaming machine
- 59 percent use it in ways other than they originally intended
- Average age of PSP consumers: 23.5 (continuing to drop)
- Total number of PSP sales to date: near 5 million on sell-through
- Money generated through unit sales: $1.6 billion

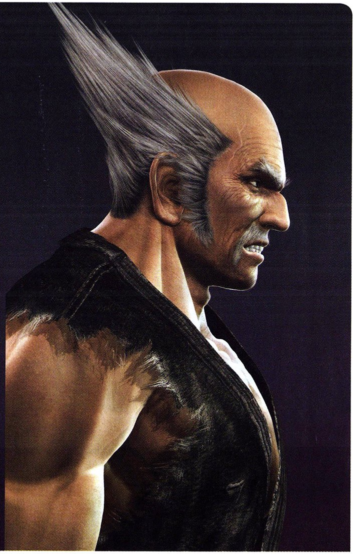
WHAT THEY'RE SAYING

"Arcade action games, which are designed to provide short bursts of entertainment, have similarities to the wide range of titles that work well on portable gaming systems. With its wide screen, the PSP was the best hardware for *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*. Naturally, with any new hardware, it takes a while to understand the inner workings and unique characteristics. Unfortunately, we weren't able to implement every idea we initially had, but this can be said for every game. The PSP is definitely interesting and has a lot of potential."

—Tokuro Fujiwara, director of *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*

"[We first want to point out] the brilliant graphics. We put a lot of work into the characters and backgrounds, as well as the character motions. Secondly, there are features unique to the PSP. In the past, the *Tekken* series has appeared in the arcades and on consoles, but none of these versions allowed for portability. With the release of the PSP version, users are now able to take *Tekken* with them on the go. Users are also now able to challenge another player via ad hoc mode, as well as gain some extra practice with the single-player mode, allowing for numerous ways to enjoy the PSP version."

—Kazuo Takahashi, designer for *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*



AVERAGE PSP OWNER FACTS

- Purchased the PSP primarily for gaming
- Average number of games purchased: 3
- 83 percent play more than 5 hours per week
- One out of every two PSP owners owns a PS2
- One out of every four PSP owners owns an Xbox
- One out of every 10 PSP owners owns a DS

experiences—but with a budget similar to that of PlayStation 2 games. "If you look at the cost of development on the PSP versus next-generation consoles, the PSP is an extremely profitable platform [for which] to develop," Tretton says. "You're able to have more depth [for PSP games], and if the game has got a good quality, then it will command similar attention to that of console games at retail."

That same philosophy, however, has also led to a problem in recent months as well—that problem being ports. Thanks to the muscle behind the PSP hardware, developers now have the ability to port PlayStation 2 games to the PSP with relative ease. While some may view that as a good thing, it can stifle development creativity and also make owning a PSP seem somewhat pointless. Why would a consumer own two systems if they have the exact same library of games?

Surprisingly, Sony has recognized this trend and will start actively encouraging developers to not make ports a priority. "We're not just a hardware company; we're a software company as well, and we're trying to be ever conscious of what consumers' wants and needs are," Tretton says. "We don't think consumers are looking for ports or reduced versions of console games. There is a value there—for me, personally—in just being able to enjoy a PlayStation 2 experience in a portable atmosphere...but that value is not the total package. It's OK for me to be able to duplicate a baseball experience because I don't expect there to be significant differences...I'm looking for something that gets close to or equals PlayStation 2 performance, but that only carries so far." And he's not alone: For an ever-growing audience of multiplatform gamers, the lack of new game content is a problem.

The solution, however, is simple, Tretton explains: more original content, but not necessarily in the form of completely new properties. "There needs to be original content, but I don't think it has to be in the form of new intellectual property," Tretton says. "We've brought new franchises to the PSP in the form of [games] like *The Con*, but we've also had a tremendous amount of success in taking a franchise like *SOCOM* and building a completely unique game for the PSP in *Fireteam Bravo*. And I think that there *should* be some games designed exclusively for the PSP.... We're certainly looking forward to that, and we're certainly encouraging third-party developers to do the same."

WHY THE DROP IN AGE?

Wondering why the average age of consumers for the PSP has dropped over the past year? The answer is that the PSP saw a massive surge in sales among teen consumers in the holiday period due to the release of games like *GTA: Liberty City Stories* and *SOCOM*, as well as strong word of mouth.

EX
STRAT
01
02
03
04
05
06
07
08
09
10

EXIT
INFECTED
MEDIEVIL RESURRECTION
METAL GEAR AC!D
METAL GEAR AC!D 2
KINGDOM OF PARADISE
PURSUIT FORCE
syphon filter DARK MIRROR
Tokobot
wipEout pure

THE HALL OF FAME

Looking for a good PSP game that offers an experience you can't get on PS2? Any of the following titles are worth checking out.

01 Exit
02 Infected
03 MediEvil Resurrection
04 Metal Gear Acid
05 Metal Gear Acid 2
06 Kingdom of Paradise
07 Pursuit Force
08 Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror
09 Tokobot
10 Wipeout Pure

ANY PORT IN A STORM

ONE EDITOR'S TAKE ON THE STATE OF PSP SOFTWARE

It's hard not to be at least a little disappointed by the PSP's software library. Don't get me wrong; there are certainly a few gems out there. But you know as well as I do that the majority of games available for the system are quick, dirty translations of PS2 code.

Now, don't misunderstand. I'm not saying that a PSP port is, in every case, a bad thing. I mean, there are some damn fine ports out there; consider *Burnout Legends* or *X-Men Legends II*. Some games work just as well on the small screen as on the large, while also offering an experience different from their big brothers.

The problem is that, for many publishers, the PSP is far down the list of priorities. There's little reason to dedicate a full team's worth of time, money, and manpower to a new project when they can shovel a quick port out the door with a skeleton crew of coders in one-third of the time.

The result? Well, let's try a little test: Quick, think of an original PSP game that didn't come from Sony, SOE, or Ubisoft.

Give up? It's called *Infected*. No, I kid—there are more out there. But they're few, and they're feeble, with few exceptions. Ironically, this is sort of the PSP's own fault. If it weren't more powerful than a handheld has any right to be, shovelware wouldn't be such a viable option; studios would have to go back to the drawing board rather than rely on the crutch of preexisting code.

> THE PROBLEM IS THAT, FOR MANY PUBLISHERS, THE PSP IS FAR DOWN THE LIST OF PRIORITIES.

So what's the solution? Stop buying cheap-ass ports, people! Take a chance on a PSP titles you can't get on PS2. The PSP can be a powerful, viable platform for new games; we just need to prove it can be a profitable one. | *Joe Rybicki*

WHAT DO YOU SEE?
CHILDREN?
A PLAYGROUND?
A PARK?
I SEE
MY COMMUNITY
MY COUNTRY
MY FUTURE
AND IT'S ALL WORTH FIGHTING FOR.
U.S. ARMY

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PSP 2.0?

PS3 VS. PSP

Sony isn't concerned that the PSP will be overshadowed by the PS3. According to Jack Tretton, Sony does realize that there's a challenge in supporting three platforms (the PS2, the PSP, and the PS3). He says that supporting the PSP has never been easy with all of the competition, but that the PSP should thrive based on its interaction with the PS3. "I firmly believe that the PlayStation 3 will have a tremendously compatible role with the PSP," he says, "and the fact that the PSP will work with the PS3 and PS2 will make it that much more of a must-have. Ultimately, the launch of the PS3 will help the PSP and keep developers focused on our platforms."

PSPHUTURE

ON THE HORIZON

WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM YOUR PSP

As you probably could guess, the PSP has a pretty good lineup of games coming, both officially announced and unannounced, but what about the system itself? Will it continue to evolve? "We try not to overpromise and underdeliver, and I think a lot of the time people look into the features and look at what the system can do," says Jack Tretton, vice president and co-COO of Sony CEA. "We really felt that in the initial year, the initial features would just be the tip of the iceberg in terms of what we could do and what we wanted to do. What we've tried to do with every device we've come out with is have consumers discover additional value and bring them additional value without forcing them to literally spend extra money for an add-on. I would point to the PS2 as having DVD playback out of the box, whereas our competitor required you to buy a kit. I think that's true of the PSP, and hopefully you'll see that with PlayStation 3 when it comes to our competition. We really want to overdeliver in terms of value for the consumer and not just walk away from them the second they invest in the device."

Sony's got a lot of plans in the works for PSP peripherals (for details, see the "What's Next?" sidebar at right). "There is so much good news in store for a PlayStation Portable owner or anybody that's potentially going to buy one," Tretton says. "I've walked around with one for the better part of a year and would say that only a fraction of the PSP owners have an appreciation for what this machine can and will do. From a technology standpoint, there's just so much we can do, but it's up to us and the third-party community in all forms of media to deliver better methods for downloading movies and downloading music. [There might be] higher memory configurations as well as extended battery life—all of those things."

That's great for the software aspect of the PSP, but what about the physical hardware? While the public has largely been positive about the PSP's sleek design, many have wondered if Sony plans to release a new version of the hardware that's either smaller or even equipped with a better screen or controls. You may not want to hold your breath on that. "I don't think [we'll be seeing hardware revisions] over the next few months, but certainly over the next few years," says Tretton. "I think we termed the PSP as the Walkman of the 21st century, and if you look at how the Walkman has evolved and the different variations of it, I think it's very feasible and I think it's our plan to have different versions of the PSP. I don't know that we'll necessarily change the form-factor, but we've already seen some form of that with the release of the Gigapack that was introduced at Christmastime. I think you'll see things like that, where the form-factor won't change, but the feature set within the box will change what the PSP will do."

> "I DON'T KNOW THAT WE'LL NECESSARILY CHANGE THE FORM-FACTOR."

WHAT'S NEXT?

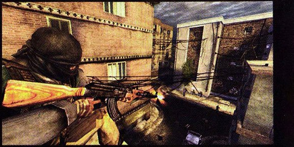
In addition to the recent price drop for the basic hardware pack (PSP, a battery, and AC adaptor for $199, available now), Sony has announced a major firmware update (which will support Macromedia Flash 6.0) slated for this spring.

Also planned is a USB camera in September (think EyeToy) that will allow video chat, and a GPS device that will mesh with games like *Hot Shots! Golf*. Sony has also made reference to an "E-Distribution" strategy that would allow gamers to download classic PS1 games straight to a Memory Stick and play away.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

TEN HAMMERS

DO YOU HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?



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TEKKEN: DARK RESURRECTION

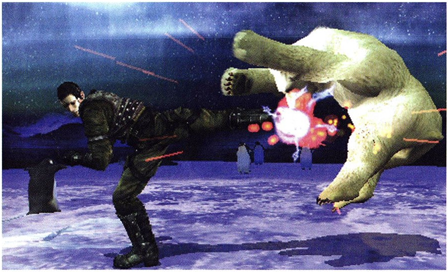
THE KING OF IRON PORTABLE FIGHTING

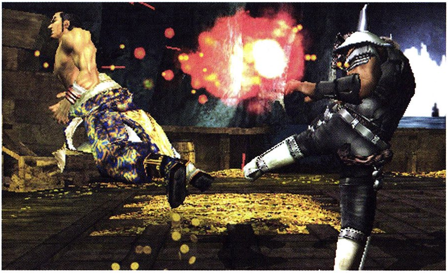
PUB. Namco DEV. Namco RELEASE June

While the PSP has more than a few titles in its ever-growing library that put on a good show of what the system is capable of graphically, it would be difficult to find a game more impressive than *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*. Based loosely on the arcade update *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection*, the PSP version's list of built-in features is absolutely staggering. Not only does the game add the two new arcade characters, Sergei Dragunov and Lili, but it also heralds the return of the once-dead Armor King (the subject of the title's resurrection). Impressively, *Dark Resurrection* on PSP includes all the characters from *Tekken 5* as well, and more than double the number of items in the character-customization mode. For example, we saw Raven in a superhero costume covered in lightning bolts, while fan favorite (and sometimes *Soul Calibur* guest star) Yoshimitsu showed up as a skeletal, blue Indian god with matching sarong. Even crazier is Kuma, who has a fish and fishing pole strapped to his back.

Tekken: Dark Resurrection (the PSP version lacks the "5," oddly enough) features all the characters unlocked from the start, because Namco Bandai knows none of you wants to go through the trouble of unlocking everyone all over again. Each of the new characters has new ending movies, too, bringing everyone's story line up to speed. *Dark Resurrection* includes a slew of new minigames, replacing the Devil Within mode from *Tekken 5*, which will not make it into the handheld game. The company did confirm that *Dark Resurrection* features a new game mode called Tekken Dojo, although it did not say what that

> THE PSP VERSION'S LIST OF BUILT-IN FEATURES IS ABSOLUTELY STAGGERING.





CHARACTER DESIGN 101

The inspiration for new characters in fighting games comes in different forms, but for *Dark Resurrection*, some of these ideas have been around since *Tekken 3*. "There are also times when research in CG technology or programming will lead us to an idea. This is true in the case of Lili," says Katsuhiro Takahashi, designer on *Dark Resurrection*. "As we were experimenting with new CG technologies, the idea to regenerate silky hair texture was the starting point for Lili. In the case of Dragunov, we had plans to make him a commando character with a Sambo fighting style back at the time of *Tekken 3*. That was a starting point, and we were able to make this a reality in the PSP version this time."

> SOME OF THE CHARACTER IDEAS HAVE BEEN AROUND SINCE TEKKEN 3.

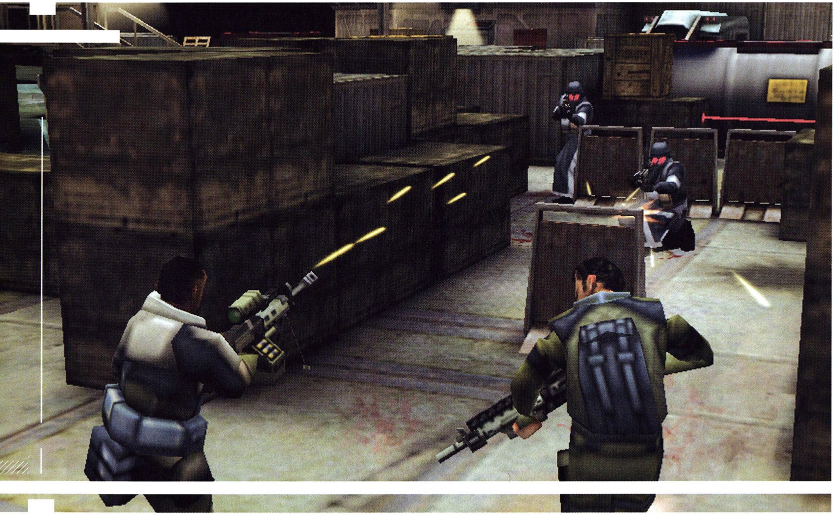
MAKING THE TRANSITION

Going from the PS2 to the PSP is pretty difficult, but not so difficult that the *Tekken* team couldn't retain the visual quality of the console series for *Dark Resurrection*. "Since the PSP version is based on the arcade version done on very high-end hardware, I can only say that the team worked very hard to achieve the result that we did," says Haruki Sazaki, designer on *Dark Resurrection*. "It was especially difficult to find a balance between implementing the swift nature of the *Tekken* games while bringing out the superb graphics of the PSP."

consists of. Highlighting the interaction between key rivals during gameplay is the addition of new cut-scenes that trigger when a specific character encounters another opponent significant to his story line.

But the proof is in the pudding, and *Dark Resurrection* plays like a dream. The game is still a little ways off from being complete (Namco is aiming for a summer release), but it already plays just as well as its arcade and console counterparts. We spent the majority of our time getting to know Dragunov and Lili. While Dragunov's Russian commando–themed "Sambo" style of fighting is easier to pick up and play from the outset, with its low, swinging arm sweeps and brutal body checks and throws (he's reminiscent of Bayman from *DOA*), Lili's street-fighting style has just as many riches to mine. With an arsenal comprised of leggy kicks and slaplike melee attacks that at first bring to mind the late Jun Kazama, Lili's own style quickly shines through once you begin to learn how to chain her attacks together for some pretty lethal combos. Don't let the spoiled rich-girl trappings fool you: Lili kicks ass.

While representatives haven't heard whether Namco Bandai plans to bring *Tekken 5: Dark Resurrection* home to PS2 from the arcades (whether as a full-priced game or a Greatest Hits title à la *Virtua Fighter 4: Evolution* or *Devil May Cry 3: Special Edition*), we know that *Dark Resurrection* on PSP has a few more secrets up its sleeve. Being able to upload your PSP character to a PS2 port would be great, given all the extra accessories you can unlock on the PSP, but for now the simple knowledge that nearly everything has made it over to Sony's handheld intact is reason enough for pure excitement. Whether or not the hardcore *Tekken* fans will latch on to it remains to be seen, but this is exactly the kind of thing that the PSP needs more of—original games with established PlayStation licenses. And nothing screams PlayStation more than *Tekken*.



KILLZONE: LIBERATION

ALL-OUT WAR

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Guerilla Games RELEASE Fall

While everyone eagerly anticipates the arrival of *Killzone* on the PS3, Guerrilla Games is unleashing the Helghast on the PSP with *Killzone: Liberation*—but you might notice that something is a little different about it. "Although an FPS for the PSP might work, what we want to do with an FPS is much more suited to playing in the living room," explains the game's producer, Steven ter Heide. "We feel a game for the PSP has to be suited to gaming on the go, something that is easy to pick up and play no matter where you are. At the same time, we have been very conscious of keeping the intense action and great visual style that are there in the original PS2 title."

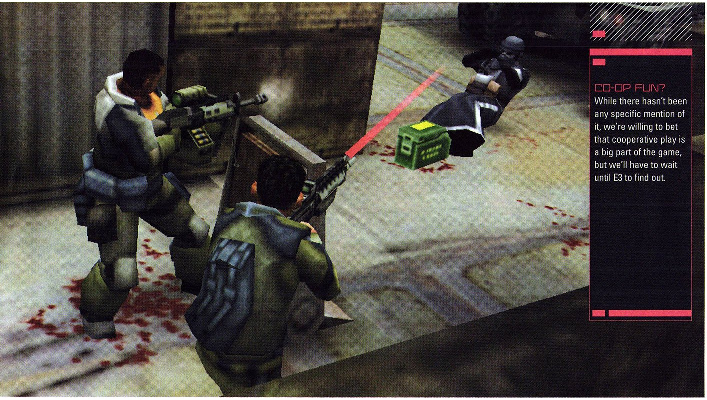
The team wants to play off the idea that this is the ultimate portable *Killzone* experience. "We have divided the game into chapters that each hold a number of missions," ter Heide explains. "By making full use of everything available in these missions, the player is rewarded with even more content to play around with." Make no mistake, though. To unlock this new content, you're going to have to get past the Helghast, which are just as tough as ever. "The AI really adds a lot of realism," ter Heide says. "We've worked hard to show off our AI so that the player can 'read' it and enjoy trying to outfox the Helghast. With the new camera system, players will find this much easier than they would from a first-person perspective. We're also introducing a whole range of new enemy types that demand customized AI. The focus has been firmly on making encounters challenging and varied."

Indeed, the idea that this new *Killzone* game was tailor-made for the PSP is even apparent in its new camera perspective, which at first glance resembles *Metal Gear Acid*'s. "The camera system we came up with really made the decision for us. The camera gives the game an old-school feel, but because it moves with you and follows the action, it really is very dynamic and a real gameplay aid," says ter Heide. "Of course, having this new perspective on the world enables us to make some nice visual effects as well, and at Guerrilla, we love visual effects."

It's true about the effects. In fact, the *Killzone: Liberation* team appears to have gone to great lengths to add a layer of special effects similar to those found in the original *Killzone* so that you'll feel more immersed. "We like our levels to feel and look 'used'—covered with layers of dirt," ter Heide says. "Lighting creates a nice, gritty atmosphere, and we have numerous special effects that make the levels feel even more realistic and alive. We feel have a great style to work with and one that allows for a lot of freedom."

> "WE'VE WORKED HARD TO SHOW OFF OUR AI SO THE PLAYER CAN 'READ' IT."

But that's pretty much where the similarities between the original game and *Liberation* end, as many of the features have been built from the ground up for the PSP. "This game has been designed to be different from the original, and our renewed approach to gameplay style demanded changes to the original mechanics," says ter Heide. "*Killzone: Liberation*'s game elements are to be played as bite-size chunks."

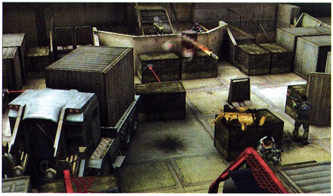


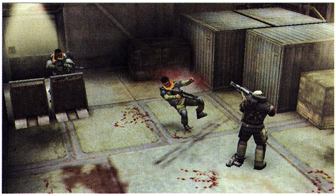
CO-OP FUN?

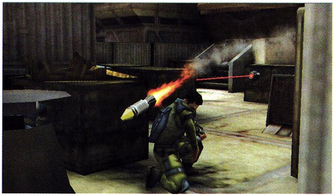
While there hasn't been any specific mention of it, we're willing to bet that cooperative play is a big part of the game, but we'll have to wait until E3 to find out.

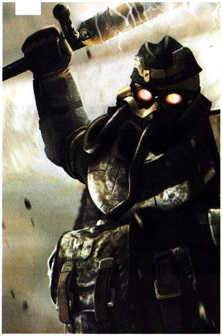
KILLING MULTIPLAYER

Guerrilla really isn't talking a whole lot about *Liberation*'s multiplayer modes. Actually, ter Heide says only that Guerrilla has tailored the game for the PSP and that it'll make use of all its features. Still, we can't help but be excited at the prospect of cooperative and deathmatch play for this game.



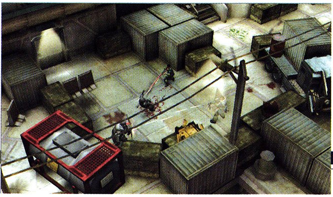






LIBERATION'S STORY

There haven't been a whole lot of story details released, and Guerrilla is keeping pretty tight-lipped, but we do know that Templar (from the original game) is the main character, and that he is on a collision course for a direct conflict with the Helghast general, Metrac. Will other characters from the original *Killzone* have cameos? We'll have to wait and see.



MONSTER HUNTER FREEDOM

A HUNTER'S JOURNEY

PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom RELEASE May

00:01

Time to make a character. There aren't a whole lot of variations, but we'll create a female warrior named Sass.

00:05

Character is all done. Now it looks like we're in Sass' house. There's a chest in the corner that I can use to store items, but I'm basically naked right now, so there's nothing to store quite yet.

00:07

All right, out on the town. Let's say hello to a few of the townspeople and find out where we need to go.

00:10

The old man at the edge of town tells me I need to go to the hunters' outpost and that he stored some items in the chest back at my house. That's kind of disturbing that he went into my house and used my chest. Lord knows what else he did in there while I was sleeping.

00:12

I've ventured inside the hunters' outpost to see a hall filled with seven or so people. One of the helpful characters behind the desk explains the quest system while the other gives me a list of my first potential quests. Given that I have only a simple knife and no armor, I choose the hardest quest possible and move out.

00:15

This wasn't such a good idea. The quest asked for wyvern eggs, so now I'm in the desert fighting dragons that can essentially burrow under the sand and shoot some sort of goo at me. Let's push on ahead and explore the world a little more.

00:19

What the hell is this? Now I'm fighting little cats, and it's incredibly amusing to hear them scream when I smack them with the dagger. I think this might be a good time to start a new quest. This certainly would be a little easier to deal with if there were other players to venture out with.

00:25

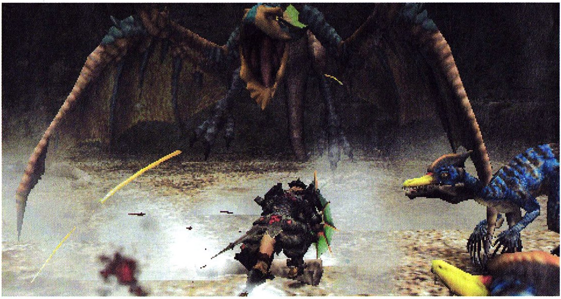
So, with the new quest started, let's take a few precautions. I just bought some new armor and went back to the house to exchange the small blade for an enormous sword. It's a lot slower than the blade, but it packs more of a punch against the big old beasts in the game.

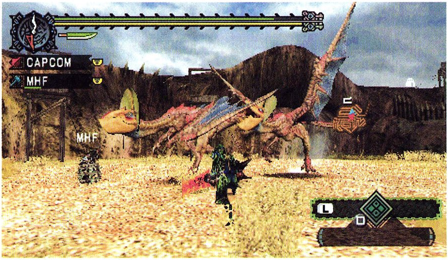
00:32

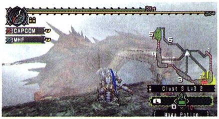
I'm out in the first area, where there's a group of unassuming, veggie-eating dinosaurs. Let's just kill a few of them and take their precious meat, which I can cook later or give to those crazy cat chefs.

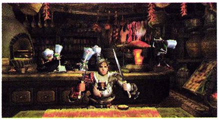
00:32

In the next area, one of the game's main boss dragons drops from the sky while I'm fighting a few raptors and kills me within seconds. If this doesn't serve as a lesson that it's better to play with other people than by yourself in *Freedom*, then I don't know what does.









HOLY S***

It's bad enough that you have to face an assortment of large dinosaurs, but having a face-off with an enormous dragon is almost too much. Thankfully, if you're playing with some friends, you can set up traps and come up with a variety of methods to help slay these massive beasts.

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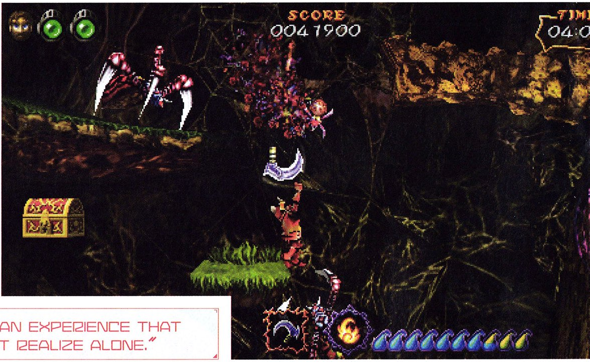
ULTIMATE GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS

SIR ARTHUR RETURNS

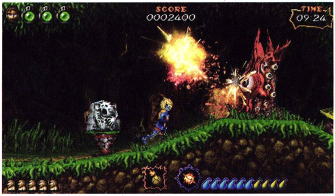
PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom RELEASE Summer

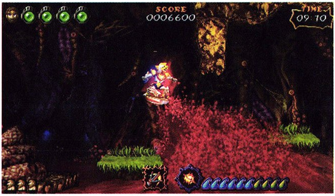


After some totally awesome *Mega Man* remakes and some high-quality ports, Capcom is steadily becoming one of the PSP's most prolific developers. And that's continuing with *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins*, a game based on the popular franchise but built entirely from the ground up for the PSP. Taking the reins on the project is none other than Tokuro Fujiwara, the creator of the original *Ghosts 'n Goblins*. "I decided to create *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* due to the overwhelming requests for a new *Ghosts 'n Goblins* game. I was little apprehensive at first because it had been a while since the last iteration of the series was released, and 2D side-scrollers may now appear to be a bit antiquated," he says. "However, I believe there is still more to 2D games that we have yet to explore."

That's good news for fans of the series, but don't think for a second that this is merely a 21st-century upgrade on a classic. *Ultimate Ghosts 'n Goblins* has brand-new levels, weapons, and items. The main character, Arthur, can even perform new actions and feats of heroism. "We added various abilities for Arthur because we wanted to increase the action side of him," Fujiwara says. "Not only can he grab ledges, perform midair jumps, and shoot upward or downward, but he can also hover and control enemies using magical power. This gives players various ways to find new, cool things and progress through the game." Actually, using some of these new abilities takes some getting used to, especially if you're a huge fan of the previous games, simply because Arthur didn't have some of these skills before.

> "WE WANTED TO CREATE AN EXPERIENCE THAT 3D AND 2D TITLES CANNOT REALIZE ALONE."





SCORE
0002700
TIME
09:07

But whatever learning curve the game may have seems to dissipate rather quickly, and the old-school, hardcore *Ghosts 'n Goblins* action kicks in amidst amazing 3D backdrops. Yes, the environments, enemies, and even Arthur himself are all made up of polygons, giving the game an amazingly vibrant and animated look; it's easily one of the best-looking PSP games to date. "We wanted to combine the wide range of movement that 3D graphics can demonstrate, along with challenging scenarios that can only be created in 2D, in order to create an experience that both 3D and 2D titles cannot realize alone," Fujiwara says. "There are a lot of things that I am proud of, including the highly polished game world, along with the characters and environments. I hope this raises the standard for portable games."

HIS BAZOOKA IS WORSE THAN HIS BITE.

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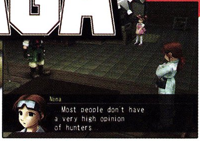

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PlayStation®2

RPG

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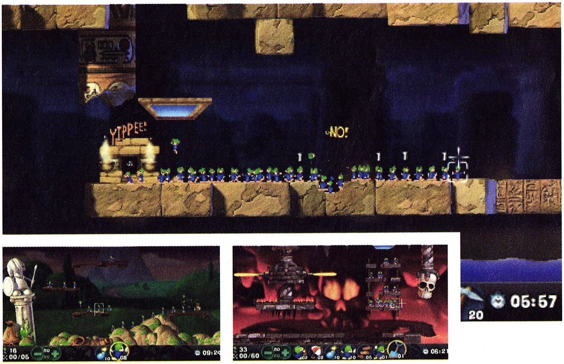
LEMMINGS

DO MY BIDDING!

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Team 17 RELEASE May

A *Lemmings* game has appeared on just about every platform from the Amiga to the 3DO, and there's a pretty good reason for that—the *Lemmings* games have always been fun. Now the series is heading to the PSP. In development at Team17, the same company behind the *Worms* series, *Lemmings* for PSP still features all those little, crazy, green-haired…err, people that will willingly plummet to their deaths unless you construct an appropriate path to safety. The PSP version includes more than 150 levels, 20 of which are completely new. Of course, the visuals have been adapted for the PSP's screen and hardware to take full advantage of what the system has to offer. Additionally, you can customize your own levels and exchange them with other *Lemmings* players using the PSP's Wi-Fi capabilities. Best of all, there's a game-sharing mode that allows a game owner to transmit sample levels to other PSP owners to try out.

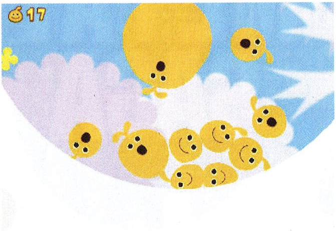


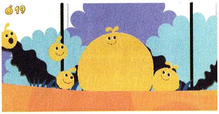
LOCOROCO

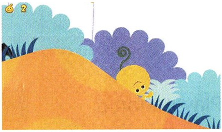
THE MARCH OF THE ORANGE THINGS

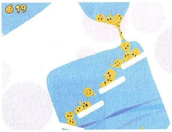
PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEI RELEASE TBD

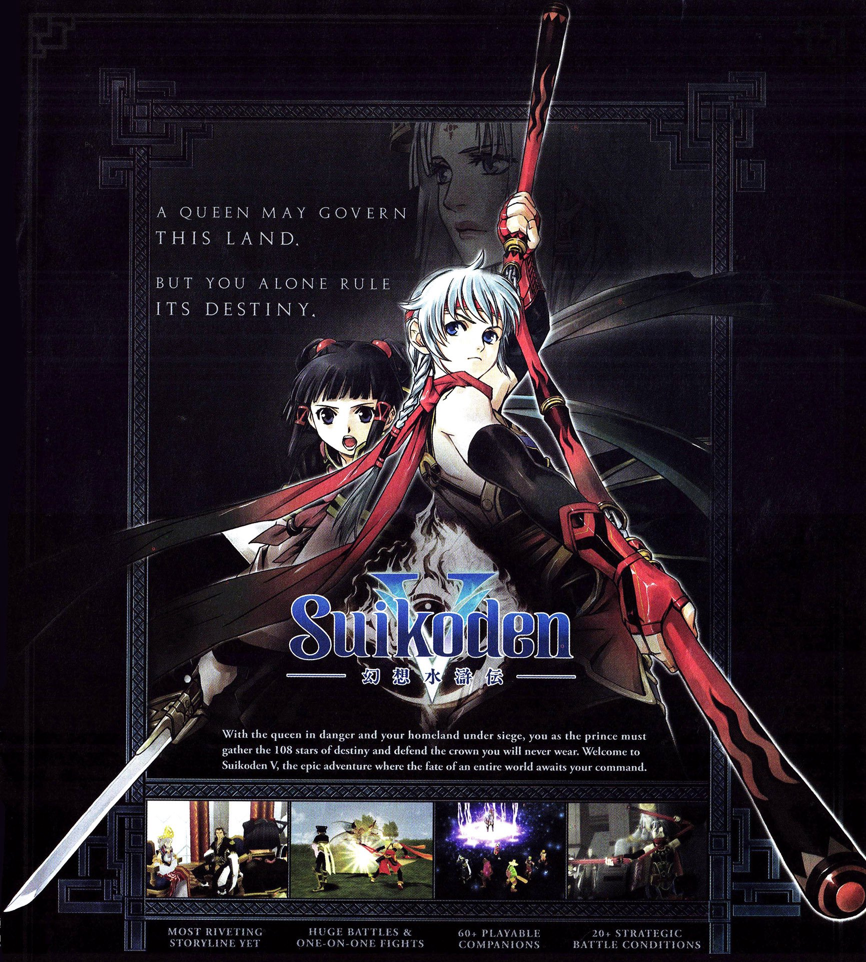
LocoRoco is a little hard to describe, but we'll give it a shot. Imagine this: You're a little orange puffball thing and you have to get through a crazy-looking environment. Players have to tilt the level so that the little puffball can maneuver its way through it. In a way, it's a lot like *Kirby: Tilt 'n' Tumble* on the Game Boy Color, or in simpler terms, it's a pinball platformer. And much like a pinball machine, the game world has areas to maneuver the little puffball through. In some cases, it has to change shape to get through these places. At the same time, you have to worry about the orange puffball's size, because it can grow as it eats the flowers scattered through the level. This affects its momentum and speed and generally makes it more difficult to maneuver. If the puffball gets too big, you can break it down into dozens of smaller ones, but you have to get all of them to safety. If it sounds kind of crazy, it is. But it's also a simple and straightforward game that's perfect for handhelds.







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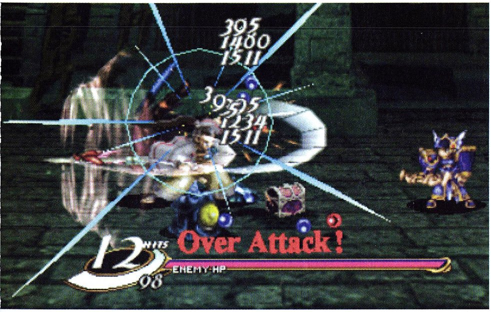

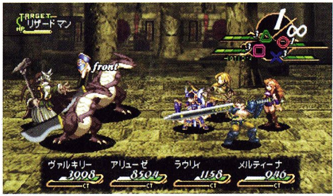

10 HITS
ENEMY HP

ファイア・ランス
11 HITS
ENEMY HP

VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH

2D GODS AND MONSTERS

PUB. Square Enix DEV. Tri-Ace RELEASE May

Remember when Square Enix made games that didn't have the words "Final" or "Fantasy" in the title? Well, to be fair, *Valkyrie Profile* was from the Enix side, not the Square side. But it was a fine PS1 title, and now it's being reborn on the PSP.

For those who don't remember, *VP* is a weird RPG that combines Norse mythology and 2D side-scrolling. The story centers around a Valkyrie named Lenneth who needs to gather warrior souls for the upcoming brouhaha in Valhalla. You choose the towns and dungeons in which you'll look for your valiant champions from an overworld map—but once the action begins, it's 2D-sprite city. You run, jump, and even shoot crystals (which can either freeze enemies or make temporary jumping platforms) like in a typical side-scroller. And there's this quirky system where party members are mapped to face buttons; you can time your button presses to make combo attacks, which lead to even spiffier special attacks.

We've always lamented the PSP's lack of cool-looking 2D games. Think of how neat *Castlevania: Symphony of the Night* looked back in the day, and consider how silky-smooth the animation would be when powered by the PSP. We've also complained about the lack of good RPGs. Well, by porting over *Valkyrie Profile*—and adding widescreen support (which will make the 2D segments even cooler), niftier cutscenes, and mysterious connectivity with the upcoming PS2 game *Valkyrie Profile: Silmeria*—Squenix is nailing both of our desires at once.

GO VIKINGS!
Unlike the Asian mythology that many Japanese RPGs draw on, *Valkyrie Profile*'s plot is actually rooted in stories from traditional Norse legends.

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CAPCOM PUZZLE WORLD

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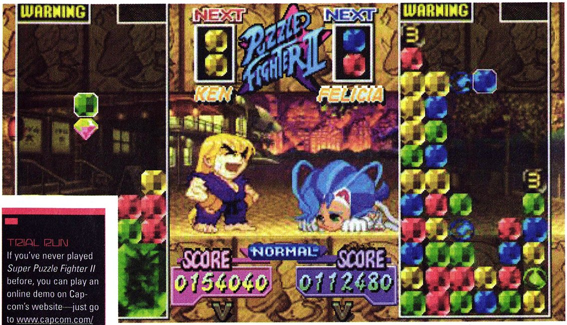


TRIAL RUN

If you've never played *Super Puzzle Fighter II* before, you can play an online demo on Capcom's website—just go to www.capcom.com/online_games/spf.

Puzzle games may not win any awards for visual excellence, but there's a reason why they're one of the most popular genres for portable gaming devices. Their easy-in, easy-out structure works perfectly for gaming on the go, which is why it only makes sense that Capcom is packaging together some of its classic puzzle games for release on the PSP.

The title includes *Super Puzzle Fighter II*, which is kind of like a competitive *Tetris*; *Block Block*, which is similar to *Breakout*; and *Buster Brothers Collection*, a puzzle shooter group composed of *Buster Bros.*, *Buster Buddies*, and *Super Buster Bros*.

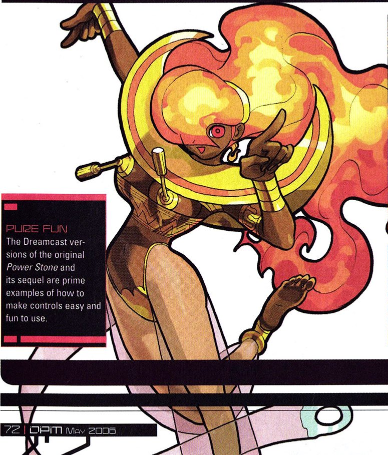
Super Puzzle Fighter II offers two modes that are making their first appearance in the States: Y mode, which lets players make three-gem combos, and Z mode, which raises the blocks up instead of having them fall.

In addition to providing you with puzzle-playing fun, though, *Capcom Puzzle World* will also let you take screenshots of your high scores; you can even use your personal photos as backgrounds in *Buster Bros.* The sexiness quotient might be on the lower end of the scale, but there's no denying that this is one of our most highly anticipated titles for PSP.

POWER STONE COLLECTION

BY THE POWER OF...

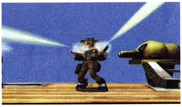
PUB. Capcom DEV. Capcom RELEASE Fall



PURE FUN

The Dreamcast versions of the original *Power Stone* and its sequel are prime examples of how to make controls easy and fun to use.

ENEMY
ENEMY



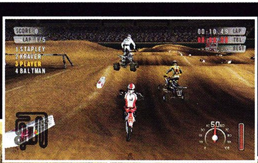
Back when Sega still made hardware, we used our Dreamcast for three things: *Soul Calibur*, *Samba de Amigo*, and *Power Stone*. Even people who don't play games can easily grasp the basic rule of "kick everyone's ass." *Power Stone* offered simple brawling mechanics; a plethora of weapons, items, and environmental effects; and the ability to transform into bigger and mightier dudes/dudettes, which made it the perfect combat-based party game.

But that was then. Sadly, there have been no new opportunities to take four weird characters and have them fight it out on a pirate ship—until now. We can take both *Power Stone* and its sequel on the plane thanks to Capcom packaging them together for the PSP.

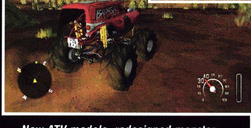
New features include an ad hoc multiplayer mode (two players for *PS*, four for *PS2*) and, like in *Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble*, a game-sharing mode in case your PSP-sporting buddy doesn't have a copy of the game. The camera has been tweaked to fit the PSP's screen so that it's easier to keep track of what's going on; you can also set the camera to zoom in on or stay distant from the action.

DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

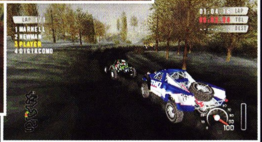
To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV: On The Edge we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-á-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV: On The Edge in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV: On The Edge is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



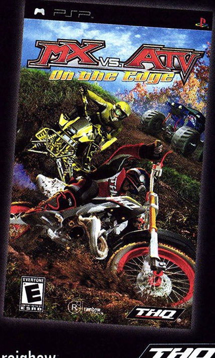
Choose any vehicle and unleash it in 4 player Wireless Ad-Hoc.



New ATV models, redesigned monster trucks and new pimped out 4x4 golf karts.



Rugged new outdoor environments.



EVERYONE E CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

Mild Lyrics

PlayStation Portable

rainbow STUDIOS

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SONY
PSP
HOME
VOL
SELECT
START

PSP vs. DS

CLASH OF THE TITANS

READY, FIGHT!

The ongoing struggle for market dominance has gone from consoles to the handheld market. Even though Sony CEA president Kaz Hirai's infamous remarks about the PSP bringing gaming out of the handheld ghetto were meant to assure everyone that the PSP would single-handedly destroy Nintendo's share of the market, that hasn't been the case. In fact, over the past few months, it would seem that both platforms have carved out a nice little niche and that they can successfully coexist because they serve different functions. Sony seems to agree. "I'm not an expert on the DS, but we've always said that our primary audience would be 24 to 34, while the secondary audience [would be] of equal size of 13- to 17-year-old males," says Sony CEA executive vice president and co-COO Jack Tretton. "I think that if you look at the people who are buying the PSP, that's exactly who we're getting and that's who we anticipated. We hoped that as the game library grew and as pricing got more in line with a mass-market audience that we would reach down to the younger consumer over time. But I do think they're separate audiences right now, and I think time will tell if Nintendo is able to reach up and we're able to reach down for the younger demographic."

As the statistics have shown, the PSP has done just that—and while Nintendo may not have been successful at cracking the older demographic with the original DS, the DS Lite may prove to be different. The DS Lite—a revised version of Nintendo's DS hardware that features a more compact design and better screen technology—saw a frenzied launch in Japan. And many of the consumers standing in line waiting to buy it were older than the average DS consumer. Is that a sign the pendulum is shifting? "If you have good-quality technology and good software support, the consumer will respond to multiple devices," says Tretton. "I never thought that for us to be successful that it had to be at the expense of everyone else. We were really targeting fans of PlayStation 2 [with the PSP]—it's our audience and we're happy with that."

> "I NEVER THOUGHT THAT OUR SUCCESS HAD TO BE AT THE EXPENSE OF EVERYONE ELSE."

FINDING THE MARK

Nintendo's and Sony's dramatically different portable strategies have yielded dramatically different results.

BY JEREMY PARISH

As I write these words, thousands of gamers are lined up in Japan to be the first to get ahold of the latest piece of hardware. Early reports indicate that many locations have only a few dozen units for the *hundreds* of would-be consumers queuing up.

That's hardly unusual for a hardware launch—but what is unexpected is that these gamers aren't waiting for PlayStation 3 or Revolution. They're not waiting for a new machine at all. Instead, they're hoping to get their hands on the DS Lite, a slightly streamlined version of a handheld console that's been available for a year and a half. Japan's love affair with the DS has been a strange tale full of unpredictable twists. Who could have guessed that such an odd, underpowered machine would outsell Sony's PSP many times over in their homeland?

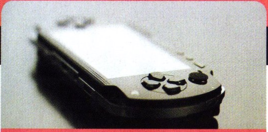
> TURNS OUT GAMERS LOVE COOL FEATURES AND INCREDIBLE GRAPHICS...AND GAMES.

The DS' underdog upset ultimately boils down to each company's philosophy toward its respective machine. Simply put, Nintendo wants to sell games to nongamers. Sony, on the other hand, wants to sell nongames to gamers.

It's hard to blame Sony's UMD video ambitions; the company has always loved proprietary media formats, and much of PS2's early success was due to its secondary function as a low-cost DVD player. But the DS' emphasis on simple, innovative software has endeared it to Japan's rapidly aging population, while the low cost of DS development ensures plenty of highly polished traditional games for hardcore enthusiasts to enjoy.

Obviously, this handheld race is far from over; both systems are still in their infancy. Things are looking up for PSP, but it still has a way to go before Sony can expect Japan's gaming masses to brave the winter cold to score one of the inevitable PSP Lites. The question is whether Sony will learn the lesson Nintendo is teaching. Turns out gamers love cool features and incredible graphics...but what they enjoy most of all is, well, games.

POWER
HOLD
5V
NINTENDO DS
MIC.
VOL



PSP

POSITIVES

- Nice big screen
- Excellent technology
- Good multimedia support, specifically movies
- Evolving functionality thanks to firmware updates
- Solid selection of games

NEGATIVES

- Too many ports, not enough original titles
- D-pad and analog nub could be better
- Poor battery life
- High cost of memory sticks

NINTENDO DS.

DS

POSITIVES

- Touch screen creates new experiences
- Nintendo properties
- Wi-Fi multiplayer picking up
- Great games

NEGATIVES

- Graphics technology a little lacking
- Wi-Fi "friend code" system needs some help
- Relatively poor screen quality on original DS

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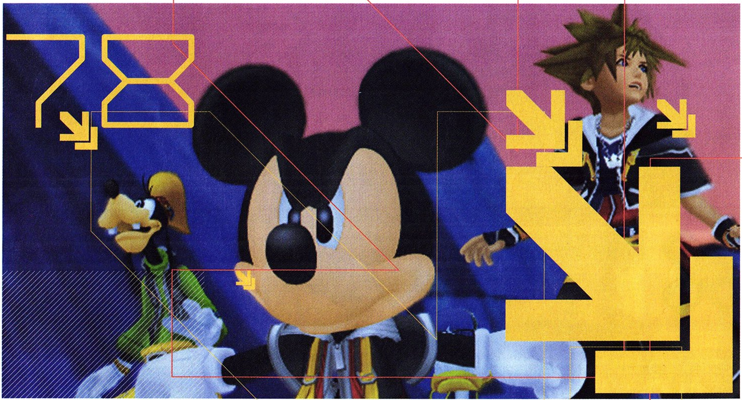

REVIEWS

MAKING THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE, ONE GAME AT A TIME

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KING DISNEY

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GAME OF THE MONTH

97
FIELD COMMANDER
TACTICS SUPREME

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
PSP
GAME OF THE MONTH

RATING KEY
No more blargs, octagons, or whatever you've called them—now we're sticking with straight-up numbers. And any game that receives five of 'em is something truly special that deserves a spot in your collection. On the other hand, a 2.5 is merely mediocre. And a 0.5? Well...at least they're fun to rip apart.

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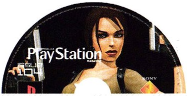


PLAY IT NOW!

SEE THE DEMO WALKTHROUGH ON PAGE 86

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
PS2
GAME OF THE MONTH

PUB. Square Enix **DEV.** Square Enix **ESRB** T **MSRP** $49.99

KINGDOM HEARTS II

SORA'S WILD RIDE

With the success of CGI movies like the *Toy Story* and *Ice Age* franchises, one side effect has been the "death" of traditional 2D animation. This seems to eerily echo the current console climate, where the current generation is in its death throes to make way for the next. Yet just as there's someone like Hayao Miyazaki to prove that one can still make great 2D animation, there are people like Hideo Kojima and, now, Tetsuya Nomura who prove that the PS2 is nowhere near dead.

Kingdom Hearts II is a PS2 showcase title. Nomura and his team spare no expense, as the overall production values are astounding. The colors pop out of the screen, the camera does majestic sweeps, the enemies are tweaked to match the world they're in, and occasionally, Sora and the gang wear costumes specific to certain worlds (i.e., *Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Tron*, *Lion King*)—it's a bit of a shame that there isn't a costume change for every world, as the ones that occur make those specific levels stand out. When you journey to the *Steamboat Willie* world, not only is the world in black and white, but there are audible hisses and occasional cracks and pops in the audio, making you feel like you're really in a 1928 cartoon. When Sora meets up with Jack Sparrow (with voice, likeness, and even mannerisms captured perfectly), their juxtaposition echoes the combination of live film and animation demonstrated in movies such as *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* and *Mary Poppins.* These values illustrate just how much juice the PS2 has left in its life cycle (particularly inspiring is a sequence where you have to kill 1,000 onscreen enemies).

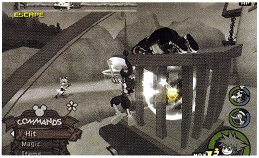
Those same production values also help make the combat better than it should be. A glib summary of combat would be "hit X a bunch of times while occasionally pressing Triangle." While that's not inaccurate, the overall experience is significantly bolstered by the dazzling effects. Even though you always ultimately hit Triangle (which triggers the Reaction command—think of it like the quick button prompts in games like *God of War* and *RE4*), that reaction is different depending on the enemy and the situation. So while the Hydra and Oogie Boogie fights both use the X-Triangle combination, what happens in each case is totally different (one chops off heads, the other flings Christmas presents). In fact, the boss fights are perhaps the best illustration of the excellence of the *KH* experience: They look exactly like what you would think would happen if *KH* director Tetsuya Nomura were to direct an action scene in a Disney movie.

THE OVERALL PRODUCTION VALUES ARE ASTOUNDING.

While the combat is extremely simple to execute, there are enough under-the-surface options and tweaks to make it a bit more tactical. Beneath the whack-the-X-button mechanic is a laundry list of equipable abilities; these influence things like what attacks are executed when, what kinds of items drop from defeated enemies, and how much damage specific attacks inflict. Of course, each ability takes up a certain amount of ability points, and your limited pool of AP (which gets larger as you level) is where the strategy comes in. Do you equip the ability to automatically draw faraway money and items to you, or do you opt to equip a damage bonus to all Reaction commands? Do you equip all of Donald's spells, or do you equip only a couple and then equip additional bonuses for those specific spells? On top of all that, there are new tactical options like which keyblade to use, what form to turn into when using the Drive Gauge (see sidebar), and which summon to call into battle.

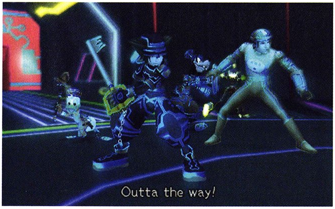
I-It's me—Sora!
Donald and Goofy are here, too.

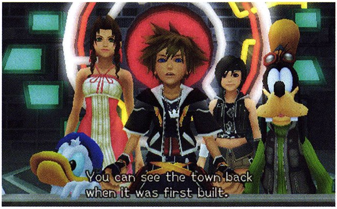
Attack
Attack
Magic
Items

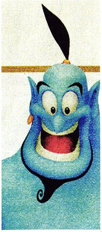


DRIVE, HE SAID

Sora's major new ability is the Drive Gauge/Form Change. When the Drive Gauge is filled (via inflicting or receiving damage), Sora can fuse with his party member(s) into a differently colored Sora for extra bonuses and abilities until the Drive Gauge runs out. Fusing with Goofy results in the red Valor form, which has dual keyblades and is a good combat-focused mode. Donald results in the blue Wisdom form, in which spells are boosted and Sora's keyblade turns into some sort of magical laser gun. Fuse with both and you can get either Master Form (yellow), which enhances both combat and magic, or even Final Form (silver), which is the most powerful transformation (Sora doesn't even hold the keyblade; he manipulates it with his mind!). There's also the elusive Anti-Form, which occurs at random and temporarily turns Sora into a Heartless. Really.







While the combat is quite awesome, the story, ironically, is perhaps the weakest aspect, despite the use of both Disney and *Final Fantasy* universes. The whole adventure takes about 40 hours; the beginning is cryptic exposition with a very slow burn that can try your patience (especially when you're forced to do repetitive minigames to make money at one point), the middle 10 to 15 hours feel a bit pointless at times, and the last chunk of game time is a rehash of the middle with additional dense explanations that, while good story fodder, come a bit too late. Zipping around the 11 Disney worlds feels a bit more like Disney fan service than actual story progression. In the first game, there was more purpose in visiting the Disney worlds: Namely, rescuing the Disney princesses. This time, Sora and gang wander around to the worlds and go, "Hey, what's up? There's trouble? Let's help!" The integration of *Steamboat Willie* and *Tron* are commendable precisely because those two worlds feel like key story points and not instances of "Hey, kids! Look what movies we got into this game!" While the purpose of going to the Disney worlds is somewhat revealed at a later plot point, no overall purpose is felt at the time.

Additionally, after you've visited and cleared the major crises of each world, you then revisit each of those worlds. While you get different challenges the second time through, it still feels a bit like backtracking to increase game time, similar to how *Wind Waker* had you sail around the world again just to find those annoying Triforce pieces. Also, while you're introduced to two rival enemy factions, the Heartless and the Nobodies, you then spend most of the time fighting the Heartless again; the Nobodies don't really show up again until the last part of the game. It's as though Nomura and his team forgot that they introduced a new set of villains and needed to cram them in somewhere. This isn't to say the story is bad—it's actually decent and pretty dark at times, including a fairly shocking "I can't believe Disney let them do that" moment right before the aforementioned 1,000-Heartless battle. It's just a bit disappointing, considering how well put-together the rest of the game is.

Despite the story, the occasionally flat voice acting, and the utterly pointless *Little Mermaid* world (a series of rhythm games lacking rhythm!), *KH2* is an improvement over the original. The camera works a lot better, thanks to right-analog-stick control similar to other games' (though it still gets a bit wacky when you lock on to an active enemy, and the camera goes a bit crazy trying to keep track of it). The combat has new subtleties and tweaks. It's bigger, snazzier, and generally more epic. If this is what happens when you make a game on the PS2's supposed deathbed, then we might not need the PS3 quite yet. | Thierry Nguyen

LION KING It's a much-improved version of *Kingdom Hearts*, looks and sounds great

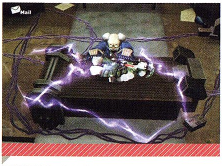
HOME ON THE RANGE Story pacing could use work, Disney worlds tend to feel like episodic filler rather than part of the story

SCORE 4.5 | 5

WANT A MOVIE REFRESHER?

Here's a rundown of Disney movies that are incorporated into *KH2*:

Aladdin
Beauty and the Beast
Chicken Little
Hercules
Lilo & Stitch
The Lion King
The Little Mermaid
Mulan
The Nightmare Before Christmas
Peter Pan
Pirates of the Caribbean
Steamboat Willie
Tron
Winnie the Pooh



METAL SAGA

FUNNY FANTASY

PUB. Atlus DEV. Createch ESRB T MSRP $49.99

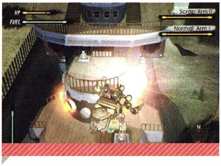
Finding a worthwhile RPG these days is like enduring an endless series of random battles—a little fun followed by a whole lot of futility. The problem isn't so much finding a game. Rather, it's sorting through the dozens of dozers stinking up the shelves. With so many worlds bent on destruction, how do you know which quest is worth the adventure? I'll give you a hint: keep reading.

On the surface, *Metal Saga* may appear to be just another ho-hum affair. Begin the game as a yearning youngster? Yep. Tediously battle through innumerable random battles? Oh, yeah. Save the wor—I think you know where this is going. But dig a little deeper and you'll find a wickedly funny RPG that's not afraid to make fun of both itself and the obvious clichés associated with the genre.

Metal Saga takes place in a postapocalyptic world (think *Mad Max* but cuter) where people survive by uncovering ancient technology hidden in the ground. Fans of *Xenogears* may think this sounds familiar. They may also think the same about the battle system. Only instead of using played-out bots, you'll pilot something slightly less nerdy but entirely more practical: a tank. But unlike in *Xenogears*, here it's possible to customize your ride any way you see fit (including plastering it with girly decals—don't worry; we won't tell). While the random turn-based battles are nothing new, the game offers enough options for tricking out your tank, so there's at least an incentive to the monotony. But the real joy of *Metal Saga* is its sense of humor. From the start, to the dialogue (one character speaks only in Nirvana lyrics), to even the enemies (a killer VW Bug), there's never a shortage of funny. It's refreshing to play an RPG that doesn't take itself seriously. But that doesn't mean you shouldn't take *Metal Saga* seriously—thisis one saga worth trudging through. | *Michael Donahue*

VERDICT For those who want to laugh while they level up.

SCORE 4 | 5



STEAMBOT CHRONICLES

GRAND THEFT AUTO WITH LESS THEFT AND COOLER AUTOS

PUB. Atlus DEV. Irem ESRB T MSRP $49.99

Here's a game with a big, populated world and a story line to follow across multiple cities. But if you want, you can go off the beaten path to immerse yourself in pool halls or pick up extra dough by giving people rides. You can be as good or as bad as you wanna be, and you have enough wardrobe options that you can look like just about anything you want, which is important when you go out on dates. Would it surprise you to learn that this game is published by Atlus, not Rockstar?

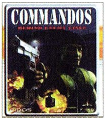
I'm definitely going out on a limb by saying this, but *Steambot Chronicles* is like *GTA* without all the crap. Part of that is due to the game's vastly more pleasant tone—allowing players to be good is just as important as allowing them to be bad—and part of that is due to *Steambot*'s main campaign, which features combat with tight controls, a minimum of trial-and-error missions, and other aspects that mean you don't have to leave the story entirely to have a good time.

If you do choose to explore your own interests, then know that I'm not making the *GTA* comparison lightly—*Steambot* has a lot of interests to explore. There's arena combat, playing the stock market, *Animal Crossing*-esque activities such as commodity trading, hunting for museum pieces, and more. Then there's the biggest extracurricular: playing in a band, which gives you a dozen instruments to choose from, all of which play differently.

The game's music isn't so hot—a minus that carries more weight when so much of the plot revolves around it. Even so, at a time when it's hard to stay interested in most games enough to finish them once, *Steambot* is so much fun and so full of possibilities that, while playing, I mentally outlined not just my next playthrough, but the one after that. | *Nich Maragos*

HOT AND STEAMY Almost everything. Plus, did we mention the giant robots?
OUT OF STEAM Bad vocal tracks you'll have to hear several times

SCORE 4.5 | 5

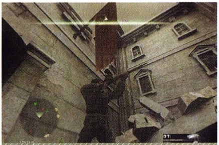


BANNED

The original *Commandos* is one of the more than 200 games listed on the German "Index." Games on this list cannot be sold or made available to minors. They also can't be advertised, which includes even their presence on shelves in retail outlets. There is, however, no law against selling them to adults; it just has to be done "under the counter." And you thought Hillary Clinton was unreasonable....

MECH-ON-MECH VIOLENCE

Steambot Chronicles has something else you don't see in your average sandbox game: boss battles with foes so huge you can walk around on top of them.



COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

THE NOT-SO-GREAT WAR

PUB. Eidos DEV. Pyro Studios ESRB T MSRP $39.99

Taking the normally strategy-heavy *Commandos* series into the realm of the first-person shooter was a ballsy move, to be sure. But fans shouldn't be disappointed with the shift—you haven't been abandoned. Developer Pyro pulls out all the stops here to make sure that *Strike Force* isn't just another point-n-shoot bulletfest, requiring you to use the three Strike Force members and their unique abilities to get through most of the game's levels. Use the sniper to pick off threats like MG42 emplacements or spotlights as the commando runs around filling Nazi soldiers with lead. Or work your way deep behind enemy lines as the spy, killing silently and using disguises to fool your enemies.

But this solid foundation is ruined by bad design decisions, ugly graphics, and a framerate that's more unpredictable than Tom Cruise's next appearance on *Oprah*. Get on a huge battlefield with loads of Nazis running around, and everything's cool. Get into a corridor with one other guy and watch the framerate take a nosedive.

Or try to run through a shrub—the type of shrub you've been crawling through the entire level—only to find out you've hit an invisible wall despite the fact that you can clearly see your objective right in front of you. Or how about the way the spy character apparently needs to change out of any uniform he's wearing in order to choke one of his victims, thus blowing his cover? The list just goes on and on.

For hardcore WWII shooter fans, *Strike Force* might still be worth a look, since it does offer some unique play mechanics despite all the weird rules the developers have imposed on each character type. But only if you've already played the crap out of better games, like *Call of Duty: Finest Hour* or the *Brothers in Arms* titles. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT A fantastic idea ruined by ugly graphics, a shaky framerate, and bizarre design elements.

SCORE 2 | 5

NAME GAME

The *Suikoden* series is inspired by the classic Chinese novel *The Water Margin*, which features the trials and tribulations of 108 outlaws during the 12th century. Hence, Suikoden's "108 Stars of Destiny." The book also inspired another videogame—Koei's *Bandit Kings of Ancient China* for the PC and NES—which was actually named *Suikoden* in Japan.

PUB. Konami DEV. Konami ESRB T MSRP $39.99

SUIKODEN V

SOMEHOW SO FAMILIAR

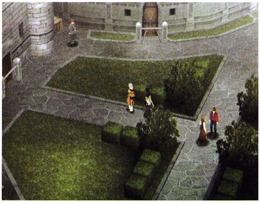
The *Suikoden* series has not aged gracefully at all, and the fifth installment does nothing to help the situation. The main battle system, the graphics, and the story line all feel like they're firmly rooted somewhere in the past. Say...oh, about 11 years ago.

Honestly, *Suikoden V* apes the original game so badly, you almost feel like you're playing a remake instead of a sequel. The six-person battle system is almost identical to the first game's, which is both good and bad. It's good because it's an improvement over what was found in *Suikoden IV*. It's bad because it feels just as old as it is. Next to games with more strategic elements—for example, *Grandia III*—it's downright moldy.

And the graphics! Not that the game is technically ugly or anything. In fact, the areas you explore are pretty well done, the character models are solid, and all that. But everything lacks style. Everything looks so boring—even the game's characters. The whole thing has a very neutral color, a grayish tone that tends to make one area blend into the next after a few hours.

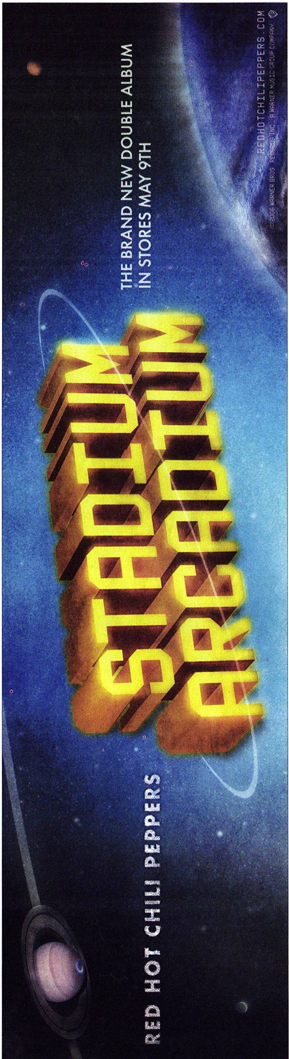
Speaking of a few hours, that's how long it takes for anything important to happen in *Suikoden V*. Fans of the series will know what kind of story element they should expect—a certain life-altering moment for your main character—and it'll take several hours to get there.

And, despite all this, I can't say that *Suikoden V* is a bad game. It's just not exceptional. Underneath the aging surface and ancient game mechanics is the same compelling story and solid game most of us expect from a *Suikoden* title. The series needs a shot of originality, to be sure, but *Suikoden V* still manages to get the job done. | *Greg Sewart*



VERDICT It does little to update the series' aging formula, but *Suikoden V* is still an enjoyable experience with a compelling story.

SCORE 3|5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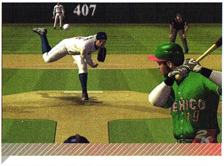


MAJOR LEAGUE BASEBALL 2K6

WATCHING THE FALL CLASSIC FROM HOME

PUB. 2K Sports DEV. 2K Sports

This has been a down year for baseball games. Because of a third-party exclusive-MLB-licensing agreement, the excellent *MVP* series ended up tapping the NCAA license, and Sony's *MLB '06* failed to continue its upward trend of recent years. That left 2K Sports' *Major League Baseball 2K6*, complete with MLB players and ballparks, to steal the thunder. Instead of hitting it out of the park, though, it just manages a deep fly.

The game's problems lie in a few areas. When it comes to baserunning, controlling one runner works fine; any more and it's a mess. Part of the problem is the new boost system. Bang on a runner's corresponding button, and he runs faster. But let's say you want to send a runner from second to home and another from first to third. Which one do you give the boost to while also managing their destination bases? Expect many cheap outs for choosing wrong. As for fielding, expect suspect AI fielding choices (throwing behind runners, unnecessary throws that go awry, etc.). Also, midaction pauses, usually before the word "out" appears onscreen, disrupts the action on occasion, and pitchers lose stamina very quickly.

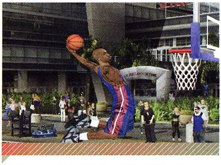
It's a shame, because everything else is quite good. The new pitching meter—which takes the form of an expanding and shrinking bull's-eye that you stop once for effort and again for accuracy—is effective (though not as good as *MVP*'s meter). And the new right-analog-stick hitting succeeds beautifully—pull back to start your stride, then let go to swing. Also new are purchasable scouting reports that clue you in to an opposing batter's weak spots and an opposing pitcher's tendencies—definitely useful. Some deep season/franchise modes, a World Baseball Classic tournament, and plenty of unlockables round out the generally solid package.

MVP 06 is still the best-playing hardball sim, but if you need the MLB experience, *2K6* delivers adequately. | *Greg Ford*

PROS Great hitting and pitching systems, plenty of modes/unlockables

CONS Baserunning and fielding will give you headaches

SCORE 3.5 | 5



NBA BALLERS: PHENOM

WATCH OUT FOR THE HOT SAUCE

PUB. Midway Games DEV. Midway Amusement
ESRB E MSRP $39.99

On the surface, *NBA Ballers: Phenom* looks to be about nothing more than bling and ball, but at the root of the excellent story line is revenge...from a guy named after a condiment. That's right. Hot Sauce sold you out. You used to run twos with the streetballin' legend, but that was long ago. He signed for fat cash, stole your girl, and left you with zilch. But don't worry; you can have what Hot Sauce denied you. Revenge is a dish best served above the rim.

As in prior *Ballers* games, you start out as the proverbial nobody entering a streetball tourney, one in which you will be taking on real NBA players. Win this thing and you'll walk away with a cool million bucks and, more importantly, get noticed by those who can help you get your career on track. Along the way, you make choices. For instance, do you follow Chauncey Billups and focus on your game, or do you ignore the NBA All-Star and listen to rapper Ludacris and concentrate on the entertainment side of being a baller? Hmmm...

The player models practically jump right out of the TV. Cover boy Billups and everyone else have a near next-gen realism to them. However, the gameplay grows a little repetitive. How many times can I bounce a ball off my opponent's face before throwing down a wicked jam? The "Act a Fool" moves now also include "Act a Fool" shots, but this game plays almost exactly like the original *Ballers*. The addition of 2-on-2 to the 1-on-1 and *NBA Ballers*' exclusive 1-on-1-on-1 action was a must. Cruising around L.A. locales—Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Venice Beach—in search of stuff is fun, but don't expect *GTA: San Andreas* or you'll be disappointed.

NBA Ballers: Phenom plays like a refined version of its predecessor, but this time there's a far cooler, more engrossing story line to follow. | *Patrick Mauro*

GOOD Megadeep story, fun minigames

BAD Somewhat repetitive gameplay

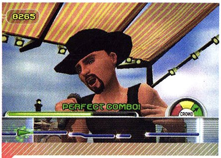
SCORE 4 | 5

VH1, RED-STATE STYLE

Since Viacom (parent company of MTV and VH1) acquired CMT in 2000, the channel has undergone a programming shift. Instead of the 24-hour music videos it used to show, it's turned much more into a culture-focused channel, with the bulk of its programming being reality shows and countdowns.

LIVING LARGE

Go inside the palaces of real-life NBA players without the fear of large security men beating you down and throwing you out. *NBA Ballers* lets you unlock the *MTV Cribs* episodes that feature NBA players.



CMT PRESENTS KARAOKE REVOLUTION COUNTRY

ALL BOOTS AND NO SADDLE

PUB. Konami DEV. Harmonix ESRB E10+ MSRP $49.99

One of the complaints that usually surfaces about *Karaoke Revolution* titles is that the song list tries to be all things for all people, which usually means that individuals end up singing the same four or five songs and leaving the rest alone. And that's why I like the concept behind *Karaoke Revolution Country*, which themes the track list around one genre of music. Most of this game's country is pretty contemporary (my favorite title: "My Give a Damn's Busted"), but it also has a few classics such as "Crazy" and "Walk the Line" for old-school fans.

What I don't like, however, are the changes that have carried over from *Karaoke Revolution Party*. Now that Showtime mode (which lets you progress your way from little dive bars to the big time) has been eliminated, the meat of solo play comes from the quickplay mode. So it's unfortunate that almost the entire song list is available from the beginning—there's only one song to unlock, and that happens fairly early on. The rest of your rewards are composed primarily of new characters and outfits, which, as motivators, just aren't as great as new singing material.

Also disappointing: The difficulty level doesn't make any difference in your rewards, giving you little reason to strive for better performances. You *could* work your butt off to get a diamond record on expert—but unless you're prepping for a live performance at your local karaoke joint, there's not much point.

Outside of quickplay, other standard modes are available—arcade, medley, and KR Challenge—plus, the game includes a couple of minigames that will occupy, at most, 10 minutes of your time. Essentially, this title works best when you have two or more participants—mostly because that's the only time you actually get any "game." So if you have a companion who shares your hankering for country music, indulge. If not, give this a pass. | *Dana Jongewaard*

STETSON Decent song list; good for groups

BEANIE Paltry unlockables; not good for solo twangers

SCORE 3.5 | 5

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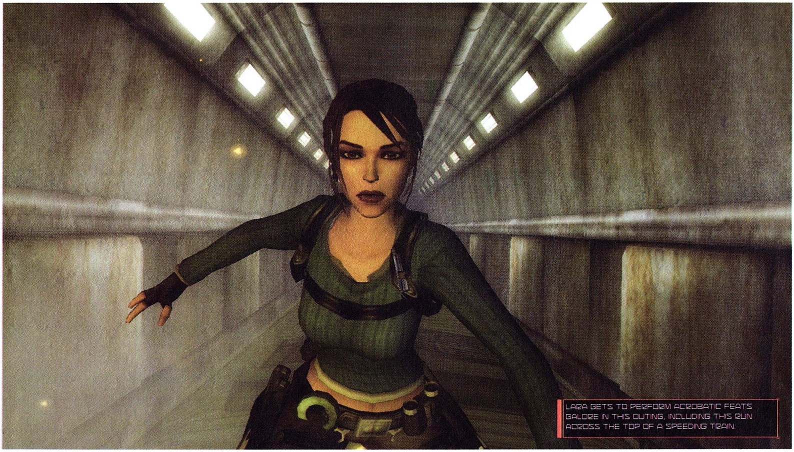


LARA GETS TO PERFORM ACROBATIC FEATS GALORE IN THIS OUTING, INCLUDING THIS RUN ACROSS THE TOP OF A SPEEDING TRAIN.

PUB. Eidos DEV. Crystal Dynamics ESRB T MSRP $49.99

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

THE RESURRECTION OF LARA

She's back. After watching her slowly deteriorate over the past few games of the series (a deterioration that accelerated with the release of *The Angel of Darkness*), I'm thrilled to be able to announce that, with the release of *Tomb Raider: Legend*, Lara Croft is finally fun to play again.

What makes that particularly impressive is the stiff competition that's come out in the action-adventure genre over the past year. The *Tomb Raider* series paved the way for excellent games like *God of War*, *Resident Evil 4*, and *Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones*, and though *Legend* is not quite as good as those three titles (which all received perfect scores of 5 in *OPM*), it's gratifying to see that the game can hold its own.

WORLD TOUR

From the very second *Legend* starts up, you can see that the dark, muddy days of *Angel* are gone. The graphics are crisp and clear, and you're actually trekking through the mountains of Bolivia rather than crawling around some sewers in Paris. The story focuses on Lara's quest to find out what happened to her mother, whose supernatural disappearance at an archaeological site is shown in a flashback.

Lara's search leads her around the world, from high-rise buildings in Tokyo to snowy military hideouts in Kazakhstan to sprawling archaeological tombs in Ghana. Each mission is self-contained, and if you're having problems on a particular level, you can hop out and change the difficulty for that mission.

One of the challenges of making a game that stars a heroine who can climb like a monkey on acid is building levels that steer you logically along the path instead of arbitrarily not letting you do certain things. For the most part, Crystal Dynamics did a good job of this, and there were only a few times when I felt frustrated that I couldn't jump up to somewhere that it seemed Lara should have been able to reach.

Thanks to Lara's improved controls and the good-looking, well-constructed levels, it's a joy to climb around and explore, and the inclusion of collectible artifacts just encourages this. (I'm already planning on going back to find the ones that I missed on my first playthrough.) You can use the included binocular system to scan the area and detect possible mechanisms to work with, but I didn't find it all that useful—it usually just pointed to things that I'd already picked out on my own.

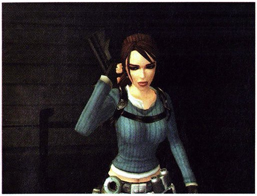
ANATOMY OF A FIGHT

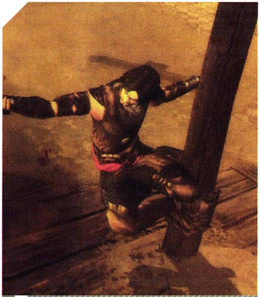
While *God of War* and *Prince of Persia* offer a good variety of combat and puzzle solving, *Legend* is more about the puzzles than the combat. Which is good, because fighting is definitely the weaker part of the game. Most enemies are not terribly bright, often getting stuck in corners or not running after you. Boss battles are decent, although a couple are too simple—particularly the final boss, who I beat on my first try. And targeting can also be wonky at times—my worst moment came in a boss battle when the grappling hook kept going to a different lever than the one I was aiming for, causing me to die many times and ultimately break my controller. There are also a few motorcycle sequences that drag on too long for my taste, particularly the stretch in Kazakhstan, which I had to repeat more

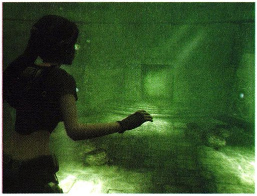
PlayStation

PLAY IT NOW!

SEE THE DEMO WALKTHROUGH ON PAGE 86







IMITATORS = FLATTERERS

It's obvious that the team at Crystal Dynamics was keeping an eye on Lara's competition, as *Legend* has elements that have been cribbed from other recent action-adventure games. The one-button recovery that *God of War* pioneered (hit Triangle to recover from a less-than-dead-on landing) makes an appearance here. Also present is the in-cut-scene button-pressing that premiered in *Shenmue* and more recently showed up in *God of War* and *Resident Evil 4*. And Lara's newfound love of pole swinging reminds us a lot of our favorite Persian denizen.

times than I care to recount before I successfully landed the jump onto a moving train.

Ultimately, however, this didn't impinge on the overall enjoyment of the game. Thanks to an entertaining story line (which has you seeking out pieces of Excalibur) and good voice acting and dialogue, I kept feeling compelled to find out what was going to happen next. The most important thing, however, is that Crystal has recaptured what made the first *Tomb Raider* so fun: climbing through tombs, discovering artifacts, and piecing the puzzle together to find the solution. Archaeology is finally cool again.

The game ends on a cliff-hanger, which I found annoying. Cliff-hangers for TV shows are one thing; it's going to be a few months, at most, before I find out what happens. But cliff-hangers for a game—where I'll have to wait more than a year for the resolution—are irritating. But part of my irritation probably stems from the fact that I thought I had more game left to play and was disappointed to realize it was already over. In any case, rest assured that I'll be there waiting for Lara's next outing. | *Dana Jongewaard*

VERDICT At last, an archaeological expedition that produces treasure instead of trash.

SCORE 4.5 | 5

stylist, stat!

My issue with women in games has never been with their unrealistic proportions; it's with their fashion sense, which is downright tacky. Lara's British accent tells us that she's sophisticated, but her clothing screams the exact opposite. That bodysuit riding up her butt and past her waistband makes her look like a 15-year-old floozy trying to get cast in a hip-hop video circa 1994. Or, come to think of it, like a woman who's been dressed by a male videogame designer. Hmmmmm...

DEMO WALKTHROUGH

OFFICIAL U.S.
PlayStation
MAGAZINE
ISSUE 104
SONY

PLAY IT

TAKE LARA FOR A TEST-DRIVE

This month's demo lets you play through half of *Tomb Raider: Legend*'s first level, which will give you a good taste of the game. The demo only times out if you remain inactive, so as long as Lara's moving around, you'll be in good shape.

MOUNTAIN CLIMBER

Jump across the gap you see before you, and then dive into the pool, getting out at the ledge on the other side. After you climb up to the path above, you'll see a boulder in front of you; push it into the gap so that you're clear to jump across. Climb up the vine in front of you, leaping to the neighboring vine and then to the ledge. Next, jump to the rope and swing across to the mouth of the cave. Follow it along until it leads back outside. Leap across the gap, and you'll see a ledge above you. Jump up and grab it, then swing your way to the left, finally ending with a leap to the ledge.

ROLLING STONE

As you make your way up the stream, be careful—when you're partway up, a big boulder comes crashing down, so be ready to jump to the right to get out of its way. After the boulder rolls off the edge, climb up on the rock in the stream and jump to the branch that's spanning above. From here, you can swing to the next tree branch and then to the ledge beside the waterfall. Finally, you'll leap across to the other side of the waterfall, at which point a cut-scene triggers.

GUN CLUB

It's time to take out your first enemy—using L1 to target and R1 to shoot, you'll make quick work of him. Next comes another first: an easy puzzle. Go to the concrete blocks at the back of the stream; under the overhang is a ledge you can grab on to. Swing around the corner and then jump up to the top of the overhang. Push the boulder off the edge so that it tips the tree trunk in the other direction. Now you'll have a branch that you can swing off to get up to the next section.

Use your grappling hook (Square) to snag the bronze cover blocking your way and then pull it aside (Triangle). There are two enemies to take out in this next clearing; once you've finished with them, grab on to the ledge under the waterfall and slide across, leaping backward to the snake tongue built into the monument. From there, you'll leap to a ledge, swing around the ledge and leap again to the next crevice, and then jump up. Use the rope to swing across the way, and then swing to the next ledge using the two poles protruding from the wall.

BULLET STORM

When you land, an enemy will be waiting, so draw your guns immediately. After he's dead, you'll see a gap that's too big to jump across. Using your grappling hook as a rope, swing across and then run ahead. This will trigger another cut-scene; when it's done, use the environmental hazards to take out the enemies below you and then slide down. Two more men will show up on the ledge above you; shoot them, climb up, shoot the next enemy, and swing across the gap using the rope. Run ahead, and you'll find yourself in the midst of a firefight. Kill all the enemies and then go up the stairs to your first tomb.

CHAIN HANG

As you're running down the first hall, the floor will open in front of you—be prepared to grapple yourself safely across. You'll find yourself in a room with chains—climb up the first one, jump to the neighboring chain and climb some more, and then jump back and leap to the ledge. On the other side of the tunnel is another chain, which you can slide down. Follow the hall and leap into the pool of water, swimming underwater till you come up in the neighboring room. Run along, and you'll come across some walls slamming closed. Use Circle to roll through the first set. For the next two, you can use the crate that's there; just push it in front of you to keep the walls from crushing you. Run up the stairs and into the great hall.

PUZZLE TIME

There are three trigger plates in the great hall, but two of the crates you need to put on them are on a lower level. Jump down below and pull one of the crates out from under the stone slab; this will cause one side to drop, effectively turning the slab into a lever. Drag the crate onto the bottom and then climb back up and jump down, using your weight to catapult the crate up. Repeat this process for the other crate, and then drag them all into place on the three trigger plates. This will open the door up top. To get to the door, climb up the chain, then leap to the ledge and swing across. From here, you can jump up and grab the next ledge, and then swing yourself across the chain. On the other side, drop down and catch the ledge, then drop down again. Jump to the pole and swing up to the opening; from here, you can walk through the door to finish the demo.

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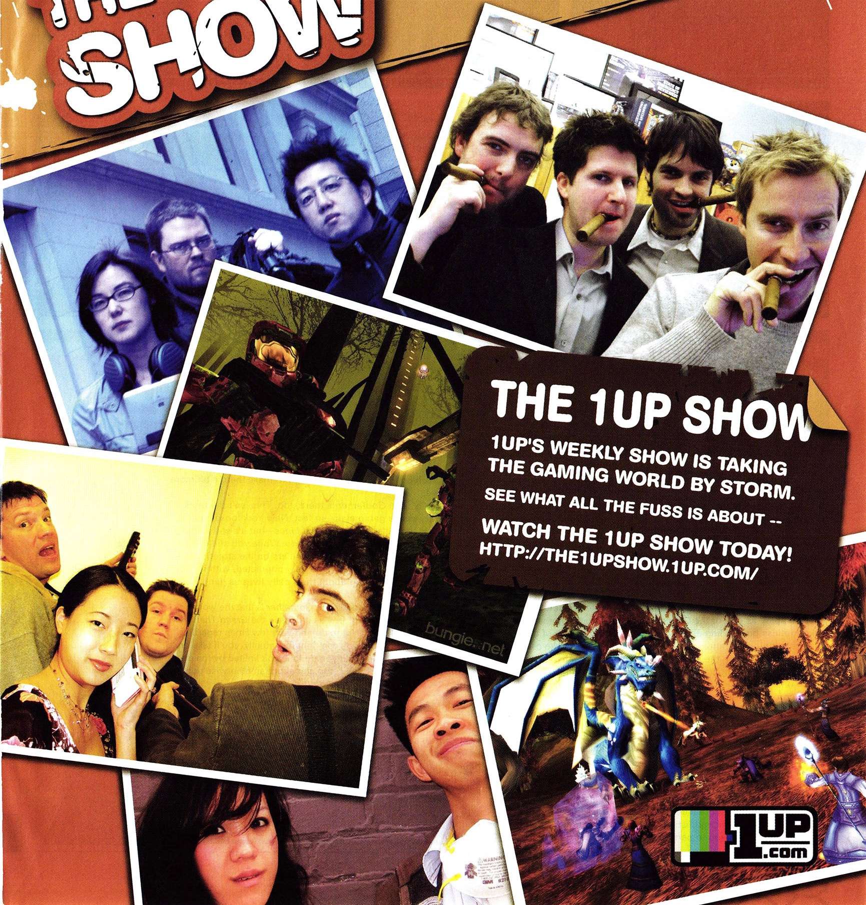

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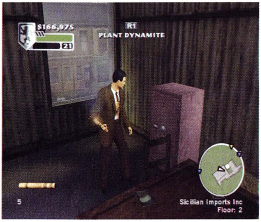
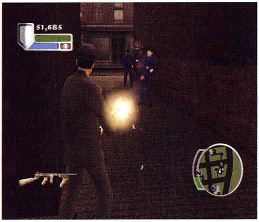
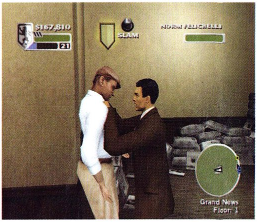
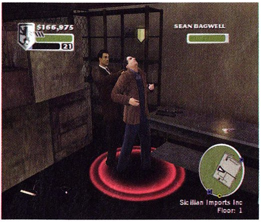
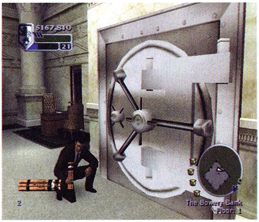
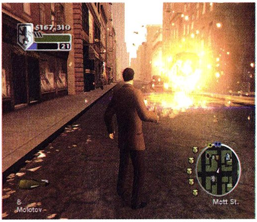












PUB. EA Games DEV. EA Redwood Shores ESRB M MSRP $39.99

THE GODFATHER

AN OFFER YOU SHOULDN'T REFUSE

This game was supposed to be a train wreck. It fiddles with the story of one of the most beloved films of all time, you don't play as one of that story's main characters, and it's a blatant attempt to cash in on the megapopular *Grand Theft Auto* style. Plus, it's made by Electronic Arts, the company gamers love to hate.

But as has become its way, EA basically grabbed as many good ideas as possible and combined them to make *The Godfather*. It's definitely not a very original game, but the mixture works.

So I've got to say "congratulations" to the folks behind *The Godfather*. Not only does it re-create the style and feel of the classic film almost perfectly, but it's also a darn fine, fun game to boot. While you don't play as one of the Corleone family—something the haters will doubtless be howling about—you do start out as one of their foot soldiers, running "errands" about Little Italy while you take care of your own interests on the side: demanding protection from local merchants, taking over the various rackets you find, bribing city officials, and so on.

The game does an excellent job of inserting you into key *Godfather* moments, while never really affecting the original story that much. You'll come face-to-face with Tom Hagen, Michael Corleone, and the Godfather himself, but usually right before or right after key scenes from the movie. Watch through the window as Luca Brasi is whacked, protect Don Vito after the botched hit attempt, and so forth. It's a great way to make you feel like you're living the story without being confined by it.

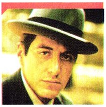
Moving around New York in the 1940s is a pleasure, too, thanks to intuitive controls and a great combat system that makes gun fighting and good old-fashioned fisticuffs equally easy and effective. The lock-on setup allows you to perform gruesome firearm executions or just "touch up" your enemies enough to make them a bit more cooperative.

Graphically, *The Godfather* is there, too. This isn't the most visually impressive game ever—in fact, New York looks a bit better in this month's *Driver: Parallel Lines*—but it's still a step above the most recent *Grand Theft Auto*. While you still get the odd pop-in happening (especially with cars on the street), everything looks great, and the city feels fully populated, with innocent schmucks attempting to go about their daily lives as gang wars erupt in their streets.

My biggest complaint about *The Godfather* is that the world doesn't feel quite as open or free as it does in the *Grand Theft Auto* titles. You still have a lot to do and very few limits regarding where you can go or who you can fight (eventually, you'll take on every family in New York), but you do feel a bit limited by the overarching plot. Still, it's a small complaint about an otherwise good game. | Greg Sewart

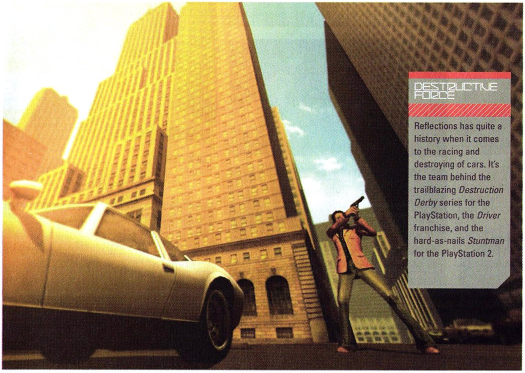
VERDICT A game that gives you loads of freedom without compromising the classic story around which it's built.

SCORE 4|5



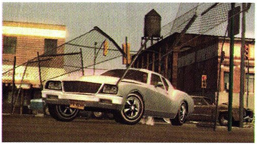
HEY, MIKEY!

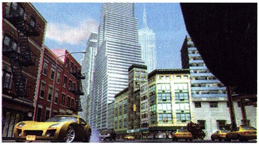
Considering *The Godfather* is where you'll hear Marlon Brando's final performance—he voiced some new lines for the Don just before he died—as well as acting from James Caan and Robert Duvall, it's a real shame that Al Pacino didn't want to be involved in the project. As a result, the in-game Michael Corleone doesn't look or sound like, well… Michael Corleone.



DESTRUCTIVE FORCE

Reflections has quite a history when it comes to the racing and destroying of cars. It's the team behind the trailblazing *Destruction Derby* series for the PlayStation, the *Driver* franchise, and the hard-as-nails *Stuntman* for the PlayStation 2.





PUB. Atari DEV. Reflections ESRB M MSRP $39.99

DRIVER: PARALLEL LINES

MOVIN' ON UP

DRIV3R was such an embarrassment. Honestly. It had so much going for it: all-star cast, fantastic graphics, years of development, and the company that pretty much created the 3D, go-anywhere sandbox setup that Rockstar uses as the basis of the smash-hit *Grand Theft Auto* series. But the game was so broken that it hit bargain bins faster than Jack Thompson could threaten a lawsuit.

Consider *Parallel Lines* the atonement for all of Reflections' sins.

This new *Driver* (or *Driv4r*, if you will) definitely isn't perfect. The on-foot setup is still pretty awful, and the story is still way too linear to compete with a good *GTA*. But the game is solid, and the design plays to Reflections' main strength: driving.

You'll spend most of your time careening through the crowded streets of New York City, circa 1978 (at first), acting as the getaway driver, partaking in street races, collecting debts for loan sharks, stealing cars, and so forth.

In fact, the great part about *Parallel Lines*, aside from the fantastic driving physics and nicely realized NYC, is that the developers manage to keep the action so vehicle-bound and yet give you so much variety. Honestly, you rarely get out of your car unless it's to transfer your delicate carcass to the steel confines of another. And that's just the way it should be.

It sure took the company a while, but Reflections has finally gotten back to the place it was in way back in 1999, back when the first *Driver* came out. That game was exciting not only because it was fun and innovative, but because it held so much possibility. Hopefully, in the years to come, we'll look back at *Parallel Lines* and consider it the turning point—the point where the *Driver* series became great again. As long as Reflections doesn't screw up *Driv5r*, of course. | *Greg Sewart*

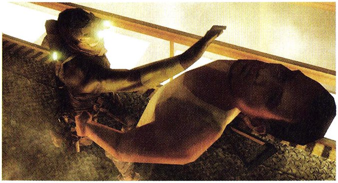
VERDICT This once-great series goes back to its roots in fine and tan style.

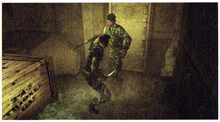
SCORE 4.5

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
New allies

CLAIM TO FAME

According to the Internet Movie Database, Michael Ironside says he is most often recognized in public as the voice of Sam Fisher. Somewhere, Ham Tyler is crying softly.





PUB. Ubisoft DEV. Ubisoft ESRB M MSRP $39.99

SPLINTER CELL ESSENTIALS

MORE LIKE ASSENTIALS

If you want to see what happens when you transfer a PS2 game to the PSP without really taking the PSP's special requirements into consideration, go rent *Prince of Persia Revelations*. But if you want to see what happens when you transfer a PS2 game *with really complex controls* to the PSP without really taking the PSP's special requirements into consideration, look no further than *Splinter Cell Essentials*.

It's bad enough that the game boasts some truly horrendous load times. And the designers' insistence on retaining the none-more-black environments of the PS2 games makes things that much worse (truly, it *is* possible to make environments that *enemies* can't see in without making environments that the *player* can't see in).

No, what really takes the whole Clancy-licious cake here is the unbelievably awkward control scheme. You get two setups: One lets you control Sam Fisher's advanced abilities (like, oh, *crouching*), but moving the camera halts all action; the other lets you control the camera on the fly, but jumping or ducking or whatever requires basically switching momentarily back to the original setup. And considering that no one on the design team seemed to think it necessary to have the camera follow Sam, you have to constantly—*constantly*—adjust the camera.

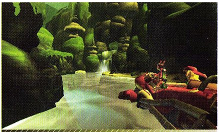
In short, the system sucks ass.

The worst part is, compared to the absolutely top-notch experience of *Chaos Theory*, there really isn't much here worth fighting the camera over. Sure, it's not a bad-looking game (when you can see anything), and the premise of jumping around through Sam's history is intriguing, offering some nice backstory to one of the more intriguing characters in gaming today. And Michael Ironside is as interesting as ever as the voice of Sam.

So the problem isn't one of content but rather playability. This is one of the least user-friendly gameplay experiences I've had in some time. And as much as I enjoy the *Splinter Cell* universe, I just can't bring myself to recommend a product so fundamentally flawed. You'd be a lot better off playing through any of the three previous games. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT It's a portable *Splinter Cell*—and that's about all it has going for it.

SCORE 2|5



DAXTER

NEW NAME, SAME GREAT TASTE

| PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Ready at Dawn
ESRB E10+ MSRP $39.99

Generally, third-person action games on the PSP make me cringe. No one ever seems to get the camera right; thanks to the system's lack of a second analog stick, it's always getting stuck on scenery or is too difficult to manipulate. But the developers of *Daxter* somehow managed to avoid most of the pitfalls associated with the genre. That immediately makes this game one of the more playable on the system.

Daxter's meant to enlighten us on the events between the end of *Jak and Daxter* and the beginning of *Jak II*. Basically it's just an excuse to get a bit more *J&D*-style platforming into your hands, complete with some pretty unique moves. While Daxter is as proficient as his partner at running, jumping, and fighting, he's also able to climb certain surfaces, wriggle through tiny spaces, and use his bug-killing gun as a makeshift flamethrower or to hoverjump for short periods of time.

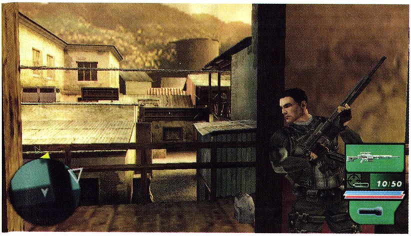
And that's the game in a nutshell. Move through one level after another—there's a bit of exploration involved in *Daxter*, but not a lot—killing bugs, solving simple puzzles, and fighting a few screen-filling bosses. And it's all quality stuff. *Daxter* easily looks and plays almost on par with its PlayStation 2 predecessors. No mean feat.

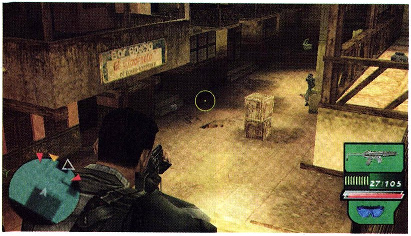
The game also features a lot more humor than fans of the series are probably used to. Besides the constant wisecracking of our hero, there are also frequent dream sequences, which are minigames based on flicks such as *The Matrix* or *Braveheart*. They're not earth-shatteringly original or anything, but they do break up the action nicely, and generally result in Daxter earning a new power of some sort.

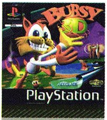
Good work by Sony and Ready at Dawn for not dragging another series through the mud in an attempt to make it portable. *Daxter* is one of the better games you'll find for your PSP, and a must-play for die-hard fans of the series. | *Greg Sewart*

VERDICT Finally, a decent platformer for the PSP. *Daxter* manages to encapsulate all the great action and personality found in the PS2 games of the series.

SCORE 4|5







HUMBLE BEGINNINGS

Before being bought by Sony, the studio that developed the *Syphon Filter* series was called Eidetic. Yes, that's the same Eidetic that created the execrable *Bubsy 3D*—one of the worst PlayStation games ever made. They've come a *long* way.

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA ESRB M MSRP $39.99

SYPHON FILTER: DARK MIRROR

FREE AGENCY

Well, now this is a most pleasant surprise. After the utterly underwhelming experience of *The Omega Strain*, *Syphon Filter* has admirably redeemed itself with a complete overhaul for the PSP. *Dark Mirror* not only makes a statement about the series' vitality, but also makes it very clear that yes, the PSP can support more than simple ports.

The first indication that this game is in a whole other league from *Omega Strain* is the sharp, detailed, colorful graphics—the look of the game is really quite great. With the exception of a few moments of slowdown, *Dark Mirror* consistently surprises on the visual front.

More important with regard to gameplay, though, is the really well-thought-out control scheme. By using the analog stick to move and the face buttons to aim, the game manages to adequately mimic the third-person-shooter control scheme that players have grown familiar with on the PS2. The return of *Syphon*'s traditional lock-on system makes things even more pleasant.

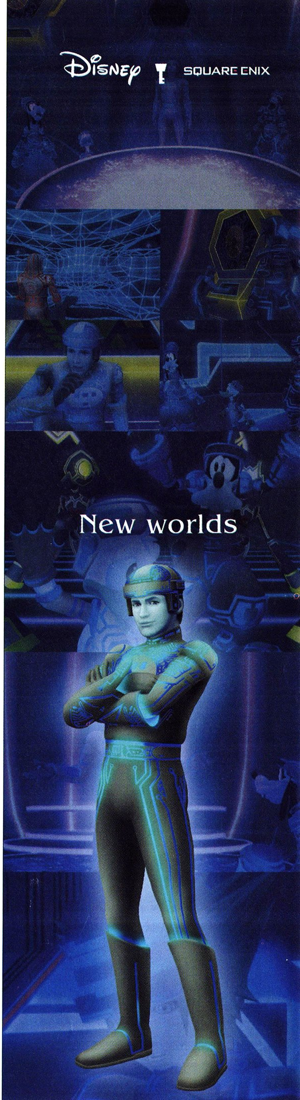
That's a very good thing, because not having to think too much about controlling Gabe allows you to focus on the solid story and excellent gameplay. There's a lot to like here; by keeping the story moving briskly, *Dark Mirror* consistently varies the gameplay, switching seamlessly between stealth segments, all-out shootouts, teamwork-focused bits—even some very simple puzzle-solving. And the story is just as complex, multilayered, and significant as *Syphon* fans would expect.

There's really very little to complain about with *Dark Mirror*. Sure, it has some frustrating bits, but the generous use of checkpoints and the instantaneous retry system (with zero—repeat, *zero*—load times) keep those to an absolute minimum. In fact, I'd say my only real disappointment comes from the fairly ho-hum multiplayer modes.

Now, obviously the PSP isn't exactly the ideal platform for a third-person shooter. But this game manages to cram loads of interesting, varied gameplay into a very small package nonetheless. If you can overlook the inherent issues with the transfer to the smaller screen, this solid, satisfying techno-thriller is likely to surprise you as much as it did me. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT This slick spy shooter makes it easy to pretend *The Omega Strain* never happened.

SCORE 4.5 | 5



MEGA MAN POWERED UP

A REMAKE OF A REMAKE

PUB Capcom DEV Capcom ESRB E MSRP $29.99

Most people won't know what to make of *Mega Man Powered Up*. On the one hand, it's both a nice remake and a remix of the very first *Mega Man* game (you have the option to select between the two modes before the game starts). On the other hand, its youthful exuberance doesn't really come off very well. It's a little hard to explain, but it just seems like the intense action usually associated with the *Mega Man* series has been toned down to make it more appealing for a new generation of fans. That's not necessarily a bad thing, considering that the original *Mega Man* was ridiculously difficult, especially by today's standards, but hardcore fans (particularly those of the *Mega Man X* series) will be put off by the vibe the game projects. It's just a little too "hooray for rays of sunshine and unicorn farts" kind of a thing.

That doesn't mean that *Powered Up* is easy, either. It's still quite difficult, or at least difficult enough that even the most ardent fan will face a suitable challenge in either mode. Even if you don't feel like the levels featured in either mode are generally annoying—as some *Mega Man* levels tend to be—you can still go make your own. *Powered Up*'s level editor is quite an amazing little tool and surprisingly easy to use. And since you can download and use levels created by other mapmakers, the replayability factor for *Powered Up* is theoretically limitless (though, in reality, a lot of that has to do with the quality of the level).

Nevertheless, *Powered Up* is an excellent diversion and one that's perfectly suited for whittling away at the minutes while you're riding the bus, doing laundry, or waiting in line to buy a ham. And really, regardless of how the game looks, it's still a fun action experience with plenty of the old-school *Mega Man* platforming that everyone has come to love. | *Giancarlo Varanini*

PROS Clean 3D graphics, fun level editor, new bosses, and remixed levels
CONS Graphics are also a little bland and simple

SCORE 4|5

CAPCOM CLASSICS COLLECTION REMIXED

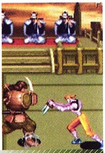
SOME OF THE BEST GAMES FOR PSP ARE OVER 10 YEARS OLD

PUB Capcom DEV Capcom ESRB T MSRP $39.99

If you need further evidence that pick-up-and-play games are what makes handheld gaming such an attractive option for some people, then look no further than *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed*. Nearly all of these games are short enough that you can pick them up, play for about 20 to 30 minutes, and have an absolute blast. Sure, within that time span, you may beat the entire game you selected. In fact, some of the better games are pretty short—*Captain Commando*, *Final Fight*, and *Strider* can each be beaten in a brief sitting. But the whole point is that these games are so great that you come back to them regardless of how many times you've beaten them because they're just that fun. Heck, most of you have already beaten *Final Fight* about 8 million times, but you're going to come back to it because you love the experience and you love the nostalgia and you love finding huge chunks of meat in a stack of tires.

It's even more fun hunting for food in the slums of Metro City when you can have a buddy come along—and that's perhaps one of the best features in this collection. The fact that *Remixed* supports Wi-Fi multiplayer (and supports it well) is the main reason why you should run out and get this collection if you have the slightest bit of fondness for even one of the games included. Being able to join a game in progress is pretty awesome.

All of the ports are about as perfect as perfect gets, even if a few of the games seem to have a little visual trouble when being displayed in the regular format on the PSP. Really, though, even if you're a stickler for perfection, you still won't be disappointed. | *Giancarlo Varanini*



DISPLAY-SIA

If you want a pixel-perfect arcade experience, *Capcom Classics Collection Remixed* gives you the option to set the game in the proper aspect ratio, but there are multiple other display formats for all of the games, including a vertical display format for shooters.

PROS Four-player *Captain Commando*, arcade-perfect ports, great Wi-Fi support
CONS More games from the PS2 version of the collection would've been great; some visual problems

SCORE 4.5|5

VIEWTIFUL JOE: RED HOT RUMBLE

NOT FOR OLD PEOPLE

PUB Capcom DEV Clover ESRB T MSRP $29.99

Generally, old people like to complain about their total lack of reflexes and how this absence translates into the inability to play most videogames. This is pretty subjective, as action games just take some skill and practice. Or, at least, I used to think so, before I played *Viewtiful Joe: Red Hot Rumble*.

It's simple: Load up a four-player scenario in *Red Hot Rumble*. Can you tell what's going on? Can you keep track of your own character? If so, you're definitely around 12 years old. If not, then I'm pretty sure that you can officially call yourself "old" now.

Previously released on the GameCube, *Red Hot Rumble* is what you get when you chuck *Viewtiful Joe*, *Super Smash Bros.*, and *Power Stone* into a forced housing situation. That is, a very fast, multiplayer-centered action game where your goal is usually to just beat up everything that isn't you. Yeah, there's a story mode—Captain Blue is putting on a movie and holds auditions—but that's secondary to the many multiplayer characters and levels. There's also a trial mode (new to the PSP) that has several quick challenges, like "help the vampire bat catch all the hearts." Another PSP exclusive is the usual *Viewtiful* addition of *Devil May Cry*'s Dante as a playable character.

Red Hot Rumble's main problem is that it's way too hectic. The *Viewtiful Joe* franchise is one full of flash and pop, and while such visual noise is all right for a single-player game, it's overwhelming when four players are involved. The barrage of sound effects, flashy power-ups, and zany VFX powers combine into a series of color flashes that sear your retinas. The problem is somewhat alleviated by the PSP's widescreen ratio, which fits the single- and two-player modes well—but cramming four players and special effects and enemies into a small, rectangular screen isn't much better than cramming them onto a normal-sized, square screen.

If you can go longer than 27 seconds into the game before asking, "What's going on?" then *Red Hot Rumble* is a decent portable party beat-em-up. One you can play with your 12-year-old friends. | *Thierry Nguyen*

VERDICT A slightly improved port of the GameCube multiplayer party combat game, but it's still too chaotic and random for anyone born before the '90s.

SCORE 2.5|5

13m38cm2mm
20m
03

11cm6mm
20cm
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7cm1mm
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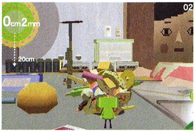

ISLAND HOPPING

Me & My Katamari's ad hoc multiplayer setup is extremely elegant and as quirky as the rest of the game. You use a "network raft" to visit opponents' islands, where you sit at the "network table" to play head-to-head. Unfortunately, the only battle mode available is a disappointingly simple roll-the-biggest-katamari affair.

PUB. Namco Bandai DEV. Namco ESRB E MSRP $39.99

ME & MY KATAMARI

A FAMILIAR ROLL

Imagine yourself going normally about your daily life. You're in your favorite chair, reading the paper, enjoying a delicious beverage, and relaxing after a hard day at the office. In a warm, happy reverie, you glance out the window and see a mile-high ball coming inexorably toward you, rolling up everything in its path. You are about to die.

This is the world of *Katamari Damacy*—only you're the roll*er* instead of the roll*ee*. And if you've picked up either of the PS2 games, you know it's a blast. There's something almost inescapably charming about the utter simplicity of rolling things into a ball. What's the point? To *roll things into a ball*. How do you know when you've won? When you've *rolled everything into a ball*.

Me & My Katamari doesn't really stray from the formula, a fact I have absolutely no problem with whatsoever. Sure, you get specific challenges from a menagerie of talking animals: You'll be asked to roll katamari with specific attributes—soft, warm, loud, expensive, and so on. But since the game calculates the quality of your katamari by volume rather than percentage, this generally amounts to rolling the biggest damn katamari you can.

If you've played the PS2 games, you may find yourself worrying about the control scheme. Don't. By substituting the PSP's D-pad and face buttons for the PS2's dual analog sticks, the game does an admirable job of translating the controls. It'll take 10 to 15 minutes to get the hang of pressing buttons as opposed to wiggling sticks, but the control scheme is sensible enough that you'll adapt quickly.

I will say, though, that I'm surprised the designers haven't implemented a single-stick control scheme yet. *Katamari* is a series that's primarily about play for the sake of play—just pure fun, a feature often overlooked in our technology-focused age. So why not add the option of bypassing the occasionally frustrating "tank" controls in favor of something more user friendly?

Ultimately, not that much is new here. If you've played the PS2 games, you may find a lot of this very familiar. But if you've not yet ventured into the *Katamari* world, this is a great place to start. | *Joe Rybicki*

VERDICT Perhaps a bit less imaginative than its PS2 counterparts, the game's still a quirky example of pure fun.

SCORE 4|5

DISNEY
SQUARE ENIX
New adventures

Disney
SQUARE ENIX
KINGDOM HEARTS
The story isn't over.
PlayStation 2
bvg
BUENA VISTA GAMES
EVERYONE 10+
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB

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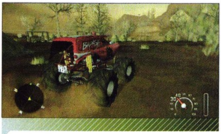
Mild Blood
Use of Alcohol
Violence



MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED: ON THE EDGE

ANOTHER LAZY PSP PORT WITH HORRIFIC LOAD TIMES

PUB. THQ DEV. Rainbow Studios ESRB E MSRP $39.99

Cheap PSP ports have become a cliché. But with *On the Edge*, it's an actual tragedy. Somewhere on this UMD is a great game for anyone who's interested in driving, mud, vehicular physics, or just having something to do during a commute. Unfortunately, the game is hidden behind such hideous load times that it's not worth the effort.

Rainbow Studios went simple with *On the Edge*, just adding a few vehicle types and ad hoc network play to the PS2 *Unleashed*—but that still leaves you with a lot of game for your 40 bucks. The game's 50 tracks give you tons of things to jump around on, and unlocking all of the tracks, costumes, vehicles, and accessories through seven race types, four freestyle competition types, and a free-ride mode will take you a good chunk of time. Sadly, however, it'll take much more time than it should, thanks to load times that can last up to four minutes.

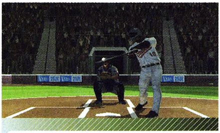
Once a track is (finally) loaded up, *On the Edge* is spot-on in re-creating the feeling of taking a wheeled thing into a big muddy area and careening around at high speeds. In keeping with the series' tradition, the Rhythm Racing physics engine is superb and the AI is a bit subpar. So, once you find your rhythm of preloading jumps and carefully using the clutch, it's a beautiful game of beating your own best scores and nailing the little things on a track to perfection.

It may be unoriginal, but it's very well polished and definitely the best off-road experience on the PSP. The sheer amount of game packed into the UMD is impressive—this is the gameplay we were all imagining when we played *Excitebike*. However, none of that justifies the load times and lack of infrastructure wireless play. If you've only got 10 minutes to play a game, four of them can't be spent loading. | *Patrick Joynt*

HOLESHOT Tons of gameplay modes and stuff to unlock

CASE Cripplingly bad load times and no infrastructure play

SCORE 2.5 | 5



MLB 06: THE SHOW

JUST GOOD ENOUGH

PUB. Sony CEA DEV. Sony CEA ESRB E MSRP $39.99

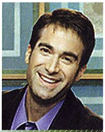
Like Oakland A's utility player Marco Scutaro, *MLB 06: The Show* is just good enough to keep hanging around (though it's nowhere near as enjoyable to say out loud as "Scutaro"). It's got enough features and decent baseball action to warrant some of your attention. Games don't devolve into football-score home-run derbies, the nice new career mode adds some RPG to your sports gaming, and this year's season mode isn't a dead end, instead incorporating a surprisingly robust GM component to take your team into succeeding seasons. More often than not, you're going to enjoy playing this game.

But when you don't enjoy it, you're going to *not* enjoy it *a lot*. Second basemen are particularly porous on the easier settings—you know, the settings that are supposed to make playing the game a walk in the park and not reduce you to a shrieking ball of fury as yet another easy grounder turns into a triple for the opposing team. And at any difficulty level, the baserunning is routinely aggravating: It's virtually impossible to tag up and score on what should be a routine sacrifice fly. The bad baserunning is a three-part problem, due to controls that aren't as responsive as they should be, a display that's less than helpful, and the fact that the AI base runners routinely jet around the bases, thus cruelly raising your expectations that you, too, can leg out a double on a hit that should clearly be a two-bagger. Well, you can't, so give up.

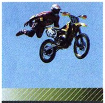
To soften that fury, *The Show* distracts you with other features including an inane King of the Diamond arcade game, online roster updates, and real-life baseball news updates (not live at press time). Myself, I'd settle for the season mode simply recording my players' HR stats correctly instead of giving them all zeroes. | *Robert Coffey*

VERDICT Like Scott Spiezio, this game is worth having on your roster until a better one comes around.

SCORE 3.5 | 5

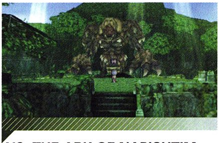


The Show's commentary is generally good (though someone should put a bullet in Rex Hudler's head), sounding uncannily like a radio broadcast over the PSP's tinny speakers. The best part is the awkward way Matt Vasgersian makes every grounder to short sound ominously preordained and Shakespearean by subtly mangling "there for it is Guillen" into "therefore, it is Guillen." I couldn't get enough of that.



WALK IT OFF!

Riding an MX bike might be a cakewalk on your PSP, but it's not so easy in real life. Travis Pastrana, one of the world's best MX-freestyle competitors, has an injury list that includes concussions, knee injuries, and a broken back. He doesn't keep that from slowing him down, though: Eight months after the spinal injury, he won a freestyle X Games event.



YS: THE ARK OF NAPISHTIM

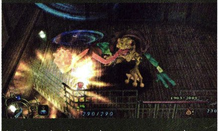
A SMALLER POND FOR A MEDIUM-SIZED FISH

PUB. Konami DEV. Falcom ESRB T MSRP $29.99

For all its promise, the PSP in so many respects is turning out to be Not Quite the PS2—the graphics are a shade worse, there's that phantom limb where a second analog control should be, and ye gods, the loading. So when an ambitious PS2 game, like *Splinter Cell* or *GTA*, comes to the system, it can never quite measure up.

The corollary to this is that a less-ambitious game that was conspicuous in not living up to the PS2's potential can be a lot more at home on the PSP. *Ys: The Ark of Napishtim* is a perfect example—on a handheld, it's easy to accentuate the game's positives since no one was expecting wonders from it anyway.

Take the presentation, for instance. It was hard for a top-down action-RPG with no camera control to distinguish itself in a world of flashier titles on a bigger system, but here, implementing camera control would just waste precious button layout, so who needs it? The simpler graphics also shine on a smaller screen; like Goldilocks and the porridge, the PSP is juuust right.



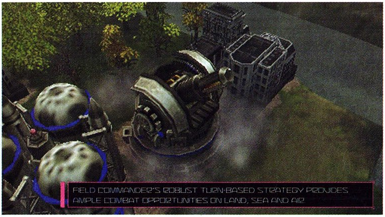
The control scheme, too, is pretty simple. The first game in the series had you attacking enemies just by ramming into them, and while this has evolved a little, there's still no excessively complicated combo system to master here. That makes it kind of limited, but then, a game's gotta know its limitations.

Though a number of games have tried to fill the role by now, the PSP still has no killer RPG. *Ys* doesn't quite step up to the plate, either—you probably won't want to buy the system just for it—but it's a nice little game…emphasis on "little." | *Nich Maragos*

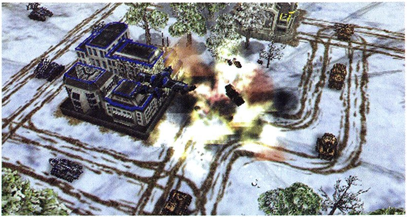
PROS Fits the PSP format very well

CONS Not very ambitious

SCORE 3 | 5



FIELD COMMANDER'S ROBUST TURN-BASED STRATEGY PROVIDES AMPLE COMBAT OPPORTUNITIES ON LAND, SEA AND AIR



PUB. Sony Online Ent. DEV. Sony Online Ent. ESRB T MSRP $39.99

FIELD COMMANDER

THE PSP FINALLY GETS WHAT IT DESERVES

OFFICIAL U.S. PLAYSTATION MAGAZINE
PSP
GAME OF THE MONTH

The readers of this fine publication may be shocked to hear that its beloved editor-in-chief owns a Nintendo DS. Yes, you heard right. But don't worry—I haven't gone all Mario fanboy on you.

Fact is, I have a DS for one reason and one reason only: *Advance Wars: Dual Strike.* I've been an admirer of this turn-based strategy series since it first hit the Game Boy Advance in 2001. Game for game, *Advance Wars'* grid-based, chess-style gameplay is perfect for handhelds, with a shocking depth that pulls you in and never lets you out.

What does this have to do with *Field Commander*? With a few key differences—and blessedly less dialogue—*Field Commander* is *Advance Wars* for the PSP. But here's the beauty: Rather than being an opportunistic clone, *Field Commander* is, in fact, the best game I have played on the PSP to date (knocking off *X-Men Legends II* for the top spot). Simply put, it's a thorough and polished work from start to finish.

To illustrate why *Field Commander* is so damn good, I run the risk of showing how damn bad I can be at games: It took me about 20 tries to beat the 10th mission in the 30-mission campaign mode. My goal was to escort a supply truck from point A to point B without getting it blown to smithereens. Like chess, *FC* allows for several different ways to win—or lose—and I must've tried them all before I finally claimed victory. Is this an indication that *Field Commander* is too difficult? On the contrary. It shows that *FC* has possibilities. I never became frustrated—I just became more determined.

Whereas *Advance Wars* is a 2D game (testimony that graphics don't make a game great), *Field Commander* goes for 3D, to mostly good effect, with only a few minor contrast issues. But the game's 3D worlds are also part of the gameplay. Units gain noticeable advantage on higher ground, for instance.

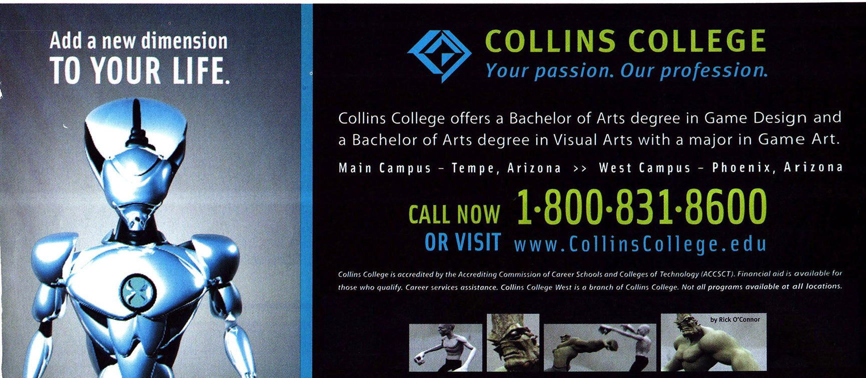
Field Commander also dramatically differs—and improves upon—*Advance Wars* through the inclusion of practically every multiplayer mode imaginable. Ad hoc? Check. Infrastructure? Check. There's even a Transmission mode that lets you play several online games at once. If any of these modes had lag, I couldn't tell.

Field Commander gently offers an unobtrusive and—dare I say it—useful tutorial. The level editor that lets you upload your creations for others to play is sort of like when your mother threw an extra Twinkie into your lunch. She didn't have to, but you're glad she did.

In *Field Commander*, the PSP finally has its definitive turn-based strategy title. Now, if it can only get a definitive strategy-RPG, the planets will have truly aligned. | *Tom Byron*

VERDICT Turned-based strategy doesn't get any better than this.

SCORE 5|5



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by Rick O'Connor

[Naomi Watts, Jack Black]

KING KONG

BIG MONKEYS EQUAL BIG FUN

by john scalzi

King Kong is like a magnificently delicious feast that just won't friggin' end. Everything is *so* good, you're rapturous with how wonderful it tastes, and at some point, you begin to wonder how much more of it you can take. Eventually, you stagger from the table, intestines screaming for mercy, while your waiter is trying to bring one last wafer-thin mint. And your waiter looks just like Peter Jackson.

You can't actually blame Jackson. The original *King Kong* was the film that made him want to be a director; this *King Kong* is basically his reward for not screwing up *The Lord of the Rings*. No one was going to say no to a man whose previous three films raked in money and Oscars in near-equal amounts, so Jackson got to do anything—and everything—he wanted to do with this film. Most filmmakers in the same position would have imploded under their own self-importance (case in point for film buffs: Michael Cimino followed up his Oscar-winning film *The Deer Hunter* with *Heaven's Gate*, a film so bad it killed an entire studio).

Jackson, bless his hobbity soul, avoided this. *Kong* is, flatly, brilliant—and in critical ways, it's better than the film on which it's based. Notably in its characterization of Kong, who's been given a soul (thanks to Andy Serkis, who did the same honor for Gollum) and an Ann Darrow who actually understands he has one. Every part of this movie works: casting, effects, and story.

There's just too much of it. Three hours and seven minutes of this film leaves you gasping. My gut feeling is that if *King Kong* had been two hours and 30 minutes, it would've been perfect. But, for the life of me, I can't think of which 37 minutes to cut. I suspect this was Jackson's problem, too. But at least we know this: Too much of a great thing is still a great thing.

SCORE 5|5

AEON FLUX

[Charlize Theron, Frances McDormand]

Is there some unwritten law in Hollywood dictating that after a "pretty young thang" wins the Best Actress Oscar, she must then abase herself in a stupid action film? Here, Charlize Theron, sporting a haircut that sucks all the "hawtness" from her being, pulls a Halle Berry with this idiotic live-action version of an incoherently nihilistic cartoon that ran on MTV. It's a damn good thing for our Charlize that Oscars can't be rescinded.

SCORE 1.5|5

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA: THE LION, THE WITCH, AND THE WARDROBE

[Tilda Swinton, Liam Neeson]

I think *The Chronicles of Narnia* (the movie version, anyway) is best described as the film you go to see when you worry that the *Harry Potter* flicks are too edgy. This film has fantastical action, children in peril, and lots of talking animals. But at no time do you get the sense that anyone really important is actually going to, you know, die (or at least die and not come back). It's safe and comforting, even when it's supposed to be perilous.

Maybe this has something to do with the source books, which were written by C.S. Lewis and contain heavy Christian allegory. But I think it's more of a marketing decision for the movie; they just decided not to put in anything that would spook anyone older than 8. It works well enough, but just well enough.

SCORE 3.5|5

CASANOVA

[Heath Ledger, Sienna Miller]

For those of you who had a hard time wrapping your brain around the idea of hunky hetero Heath Ledger as a gay cowboy, here's your "dear boy" Heath playing that most famous of Italian lovers—and also boinking the brains out of Sienna Miller. Who, despite cross-dressing in the film, looks nothing at all like Jake Gyllenhaal. Sadly, the rest of the movie is something of a loss, but I guess you can't have everything, can you?

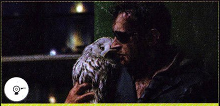
SCORE 2.5|5

HOSTEL

[Jay Hernandez, Derek Richardson]

Surely the film that'll make you reconsider that Eastern European hitchhiking trip you've been planning with your college buddies. Three dim-witted twentysomethings end up in the wrong neighborhood (that'd be Slovakia), and the next thing they know, they're being sliced and diced in a torture club. It's gruesome in that whole *Saw* sort of way. Just don't see it just after you've eaten. Or after you've met a girl named Svetlana.

SCORE 3|5



NIGHT WATCH

[Konstantin Khabensky, Vladimir Menshov]

This is the most successful Russian film of all time, probably because it combines over-the-top, Hollywood-like action and special effects with a uniquely dour point of view that could only come out of the former Soviet Union. It doesn't make a lick of sense (it's your basic "minions of dark and light face off and whoops here comes the apocalypse" sort of thing), but it's interesting to watch. And all the cool kids in Hollywood will soon be ripping it off.

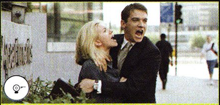
SCORE 3.5|5

FUN WITH DICK AND JANE

[Jim Carrey, Téa Leoni]

I can't find a single person who'll admit to attending this comedy (in which Carrey and Leoni play yuppies who turn to crime when their jobs give out), largely because it looks (and, well, kinda is) tired, lame, and not especially funny. And yet, the film made $110 million, so someone must've seen it. Did they bus in people from nursing homes? Coma patients? Guantánamo Bay prisoners? This may become one of the great unsolved mysteries.

SCORE 2.5|5



MATCH POINT

[Scarlett Johansson, Jonathan Rhys Meyers]

One of those films in which almost no one is nice, but they're all varying degrees of smart, pretty, and scheming—which is more interesting, anyway. Scarlett Johansson and Jonathan Rhys Meyers are two interlopers shoehorning their way into a rich British family. And if you think you know just who is using whom in this film, you're probably wrong in a really interesting way. This is by Woody Allen, who reminds us: Why yes, he can direct.

SCORE 4.5|5

TRISTAN + ISOLDE

[James Franco, Sophia Myles]

Everyone knows about Romeo and Juliet, but only real literary dorks know about Tristan and Isolde, which is why it's puzzling someone paid money to have a movie made about these mythical lovers. But ours is not to question why. Ours is to watch, and this flick is surprisingly watchable. And it's also (considering its source, which involves a love potion not in evidence here) marginally realistic, and better than I'd have given it credit for.

SCORE 3.5|5

DVD RELEASE

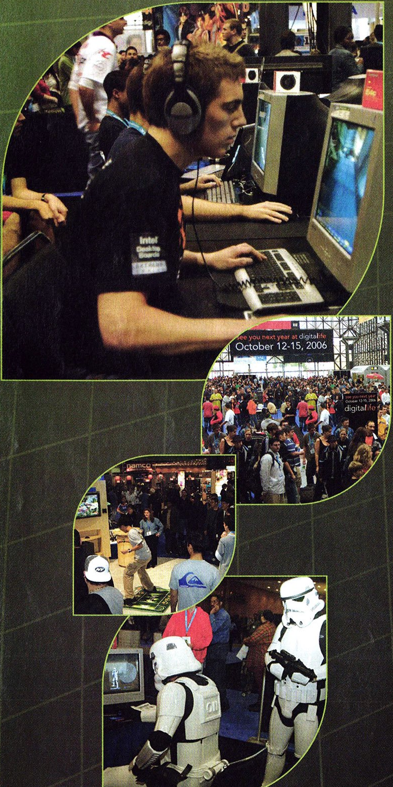
April 4
The Chronicles of Narnia: TLTWATW
Night Watch
April 11
Fun With Dick and Jane
King Kong
April 18
Hostel
April 25
Aeon Flux
Casanova
Match Point
Tristan + Isolde

UMD RELEASE

April 4
The Chronicles of Narnia: TLTWATW
April 11
Fun With Dick and Jane
April 18
Hostel

[redacted]

Don't let the competition beat you at your own game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REPLAY

REVVING UP THE PLAYSTATION WAYBACK MACHINE

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NEVER FINAL

THE EVER-GROWING WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY XI

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NIN

MELKOR

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Linkshells:
fUSE
hero
Memento
Nationality:
Bastokian

3D Renders: Tony Lee; Estya @ Ramuh

NEVER FINAL

THE EVER-GROWING WORLD OF FINAL FANTASY XI

Final Fantasy XI on PS2 is like an exclusive club. While the game boasts half a million players, most of those are on PC—and with the PS2 hardware no longer having any room for a hard drive, the *FFXI* PS2 community doesn't stand much chance of expanding. Nevertheless, as with many massively multiplayer online RPGs, *FFXI* draws a dedicated, close-knit community of players for whom the game is a thriving alternate life. With Square Enix preparing to release another expansion pack in April, we decided to turn loose the office's most rabid *FFXI* fans—1UP's James Mielke and our own art director, Ryan Vulk—to talk about the game's past, present, and future. Let's listen in.

| JAMES MIELKE Ryan, when did you start playing *Final Fantasy XI*?

| RYAN VULK I picked it up about a month after it came out for the PS2. I was a big *SOCOM* junkie at the time and looked forward to the maps that were supposed to come out for the hard drive later that year. Not wanting to let the HDD go to waste in the meantime, I thought I'd check out *FFXI*.

| JM I first started playing using the Japanese client on PC. But I wasn't too impressed with it when it first came out because I was a *Phantasy Star Online* fanatic, so *FFXI*'s overly busy menu system annoyed me at first.

| RV Yeah, I had no clue what I was doing; everything was a little too much for me in the beginning. My first party invite took me 10 minutes to get into and a patient hume to walk me through the process. Then when I finally figured it out, I found myself in an alliance beating up orcs in West Ronfaure for a mission. It was fun running around in a horde like that, beating up everything in sight.

| JM When I was first playing on the Japanese version, I didn't know to check how each creature rated, i.e., Too Weak, Easy Prey, Decent Challenge, Incredibly Tough, etc. None of the *Final Fantasy* games ever had a system like that, so I initially found it quite unusual.

| RV This was really frustrating for me as well, and the aggro thing was freakin' me out every time. I just wanted to explore and beat s*** up, but I didn't know my limits. I was frustrated at first, but it was an interesting learning experience for me. I did enjoy the fact that it felt like a whole brand-new world. Looking at the region map and wondering what was out there—to this day there are still aspects of this game that I haven't experienced, and I look forward to doing so.

| JM I play a lot of MMOs and try all of them for at least a little while, and the first thing I learned about *FFXI* is that it's not easy. I think it looks a lot better than games like *World of WarCraft* or *EverQuest* due to the style and the more "realistically" proportioned characters. But in terms of gameplay, I didn't realize how reliant it was on parties.

| RV It's still fun running into that random friend like you would on the street and swapping battle stories or reminiscing about the past. I tried to do this in *WOW*, but it wasn't for me. The characters and environments didn't feel comfortable. Everything seems out of place to me visually. Also, being forced to form parties supports that foundation of community and builds long-lasting friendships. I didn't see that in other MMOs like *WOW*. It could be there if I tried it out more, I guess, but my home is here in *FFXI*. I wouldn't give up the experiences I've had with these people for anything else.

> "I WOULDN'T GIVE UP THE EXPERIENCES I'VE HAD WITH THESE PEOPLE FOR ANYTHING ELSE."

| JM The funny thing is that you really don't know what you're doing in this game for about the first 60 levels. I know a lot of level 75 types who still are the worst players you'd ever run into. You wonder, "How the hell did this guy get to 75?" But it's a war of attrition. You can be a crappy white mage, but no one's going to kick you out of their party for being a bad white mage. So before you know it, that white mage has gained 4,000 experience points before the party disbands because he sucks so bad.

| RV The same thing goes for tanks as well: It's a job that's needed and gets invites fast. This was one of my main decisions to go with a paladin and ninja. I wanted to meet more people and develop new friendships. My first 60 levels were as a dark knight, and at the 60 mark I needed to level as a thief, but I wasn't prepared—I didn't understand the job well enough. So I decided to go to tanking and try something new instead of looking horrible at my job. Now that I've seen how a thief is used, I might go back to the dark knight to fulfill my first goal in this game.

| JM Yeah, I like the different experience each job offers, and not only that, but what each race offers. That's why I have a high-level hume red mage, a mithra ninja and thief, and an elvaan warrior—and I'm working on a paladin. There are only so many hours in the day, but I feel like I can really handle any job that's thrown at me. I know I am a very skilled red mage and ninja, which are two of the trickiest jobs to master. But my static party levels fast, and we do stuff like the *Chains of Promathia* missions flawlessly where many lesser parties fail.

GOALS

A GLIMPSE INTO MELKOR'S FUTURE

Current
- To get NIN to 75, then start meriting
- To finish off *COP*
- To continue leveling NPC, Yoli
- To level PLD to 75 to help cap parry on NIN

Long-Term
- Full Relic NIN Artifact
- To finish off DRK to 75

| SELECTS

Pictured are just a few moments from the neverending *FFXI* experiences of our resident experts. Not every excursion involves taking down Kirin, but every moment counts.

Demon Knight
Demon Pawn
Demon Pawn
Demon Pawn
Demon Pawn
Demon Pa

| AGGRO!

Pandian
Rancho
Frebond
Sylvain
Raine

| ARTIFACT BATTLES

Melkor
Ameow
Datual
Toj
Dien

| MISSION 5.2: SHADOWLORD

| GENKAI V: MAAT FIGHT

| RV I do wish I had countless hours to spend leveling my character, but I had to narrow my focus for the time being to just paladin and ninja. I did think of switching races to see what they offered, but I can't imagine going through all that again. Plus, the ability to switch jobs and have your attributes transfer over helps reaffirm that you're building a character. This allows the freedom to learn other jobs with a single character and understand the game more. Also, since I'm close to 75, I'm looking forward to meriting and building up my ninja more.

| JM Each race plays differently, and I won't lie when I say that I play the jobs that mithran stats lend themselves to, namely high-dexterity and high-agility jobs. It helps me excel at tanking. Likewise, my elvaan's high strength and vitality make her a great paladin. And I use every ability at my disposal to keep my party alive. What's most interesting to me is to play in ways that benefit the group, not the individual.

| RV One thing that I noticed between playing a game like *SOCOM* and *FFXI* at the same time is that I found myself enjoying the long-term goal with *FFXI* and not the quick deathmatch in *SOCOM*. In *SOCOM* I would spend countless hours playing the same level over and over again, with no reward after weeks of killing. Yeah, my kill count went up, but I wasn't satisfied. With *FFXI*, getting that item for yourself or helping out others is one of the best gaming experiences that I've had so far. That teamwork and community and the satisfaction and enjoyment of being with friends keep me coming back.

| JM What don't you like about the game? As a dude in his 30s, I hate seeing kids bicker and fight and shout and call each other stupid stuff all in the name of getting some stupid virtual item. There's a great big world out there that doesn't give a crap about your Koenig armor, so the people who pride themselves on the asses they kissed to get that gear really need to put it in check.

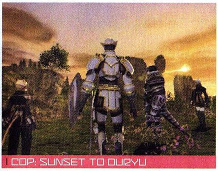
| RV I understand that there is competition in this game, and it helps fuel the desire to play and make yourself better, but some people just don't respect each other.

| JM I avoid reading *FFXI* message boards unless it's about an item I need info on, because reading these kids on a superiority trip makes me not want to have kids. It's even worse when it's adults talking smack, like anyone cares. Trust me, when you turn off your computer, that hot chick walking down the street isn't impressed by how bad you trash talked another "HNMLS" on a message board.

| RV Very true. I run into people from time to time who say stupid s*** for no reason. I mainly have shouts off unless I need a teleport or some small random thing like that—it just adds to the negative static. I come to this world to escape and chill out from a long day. I guess you could say it's my glass of wine that calms me down.

| JM You know what calms me down? Being with my tight-knit group of friends in the game (whom I've actually met and hung out with in real life) and achieving important goals with them. I'll take that over the rarest piece of armor in the game any day.

| RV It's the same with me; I have close group of five people on my friends list that I've known for the longest time. We have hit countless goals together and even though we go our separate ways from time to time, it's nice to come back and group up like old times. It's nice to have that comfort zone of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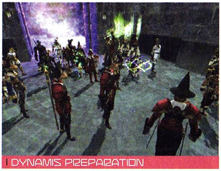
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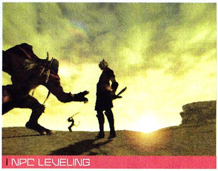
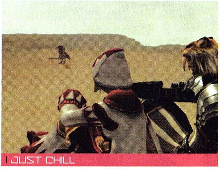

| NPC LEVELING


| JUST CHILL

trust and respect. I believe the core of this game is the friendships made and the experiences in this world we have together.

| JM Well, what did you like and not like about *Chains of Promathia*, and what are you looking forward to in *Treasures of Aht Urghan*?

| RV Farming for certain items for *COP* is a pain in the ass, and all the level-capped areas are no fun. It's not the challenge that holds me back, but all the damn armor I have to store. Going through *COP*, I had to create an extra character just for that. But it definitely has added to the team-bonding and is rewarding enough that the struggle and frustration only makes you a better player.

With *TOAU*, I'm excited for Besieged and any new armor that is associated with the region. Seeing new beastmen is a thrill; I can only beat up the same mob for so long—whacking on crabs can take its toll. The addition of new jobs is nice to see as well. Overall, I want to just explore the new areas.

| JM Personally, I had mostly the same reservations with *COP*. I feel that it's mostly endgame stuff and not nearly as much middle-level content as the company envisioned. It's getting a little more interesting at the end, but it's mostly a lot of running around and level-capped crap. Not every expansion can have new jobs, like *TOAU* will, because there would be balance issues. But I often find that the patches have more intriguing gameplay additions than the expansions themselves. However, *TOAU* does look like it's going to be supercool.

> "WHAT'S MOST INTERESTING TO ME IS TO PLAY IN WAYS THAT BENEFIT THE GROUP."

| RV I actually did my first brenner the other night and had a blast doing it. Never having done a ballista match before, this was a great time, and a new aspect of the game that leaves me wanting more. That's what's great and amazing about this world: You can always find something new to grab your interest. *FFXI* is my drug of choice these days, I guess.

| JM It's going to be hard for anyone new to begin playing *FFXI* on PS2 since Sony jacked HDD support.

| RV Fortunately, over the past two years, mine hasn't busted on me yet. From taking it back and forth from home to work the whole time and setting up bazaars on mules, I figured it would be dead by now. But it's still going strong.

| JM Well, anyway, my goal before the expansion comes out is to max out my ninja at 75, and level all my necessary subjobs. What about you?

| RV My ninja is getting close to 75, and I have to go back and get my warrior up to 37 so I don't look like a total newb. But besides that, I plan on just helping out the random shout or tell I get from friends. Getting *COP* finished would be great, too.

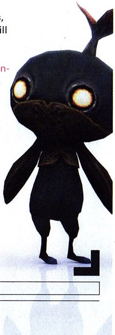
| JM Well, my ninja is level 69. How about I race you to 75?

RV Sounds good—I'm 35K away.

| JM All right. I'll see you at the finish line. |

SPECIAL THANKS

This list could go on forever and ever, but I want to take the time to give a special thanks to Rancho, Frebond, Nukaka, Zxero, Tej, Gliran, Domon, and especially that mithra Ameow for being there for me. It has been a wonderful journey so far, and I can't wait to see what the future holds for all of us. Thanks again to everyone here and in Ramuh who has made this more than just a game for me.
<Take Care>
/bow
/salute
–Melkor
(Ryan Vulk)



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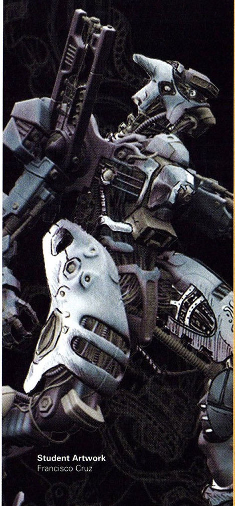
– Electronic Gaming Monthly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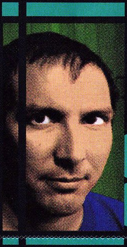
GUITAR HERO'S creator talks music-game theory

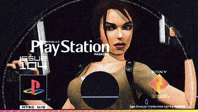


At the ripe young age of 61, my mother-in-law played her first videogame. Coaxed along by the insistence of her grandchildren ("Play! Play! Play!") and more than a little curiosity about the game they were playing, "Granny" donned a plastic toy guitar and confidently strummed her way through *Guitar Hero*'s version of "I Love Rock 'N Roll." It was a testament to both the universal appeal of music and the clever ways videogame makers have harnessed its power. Greg LoPiccolo, vice president of product development for *Guitar Hero* developer Harmonix, has seen the evolution of music-based games from the inside. On the way to concocting what is arguably the best game of the genre, Harmonix experimented with a wide range of recipes, from the DualShock-as-drum-machine assault of *Frequency* and *Amplitude* to the computerized voice coaching of the *Karaoke Revolution* series.

For Harmonix, the basic idea behind music games is to "use technology to let nonmusicians have the experience of playing music," LoPiccolo says. "We all agree that it's one of the most fun and rewarding experiences possible, but one that's denied to most people, because most people don't have the decade-plus it takes to really get skilled on an instrument." So, if you can't pull yourself away from *The O.C.* long enough to learn a few guitar chords (or get past the bleeding fingers bit), LoPiccolo and co. are there to help you live out your musical fantasies. And maybe, just maybe, you'll learn a few basics that will help you with the real thing. As strange as the idea may seem, playing a game and playing an instrument are pretty similar activities.

"There's a lot of commonality between gameplay and music making," LoPiccolo says. "[Musical instruments] are these completely arbitrary chunks of metal and plastic and wood. You hit little buttons, you blow into them, you make their strings vibrate, and sound comes out. Videogames are the same way. In both cases, you have a kind of abstract interface." It also helps that musicians and gamers share a similar workout routine when it comes to hand-eye coordination.

"Gamers have this well-developed set of motor skills that applies well to music," LoPiccolo says. "So we try to use a language that gamers already understand—high scores, power-ups, all that kind of stuff—and apply it to a musical experience." The formula (twitchy gamer fingers + music = fun) seems simple, but subtle design choices made in a music game can have a huge effect on the experience. Take, for instance, the seemingly benign issue of timing. Anyone familiar with the rhythm-based games of the music genre will tell you that they're all about hitting specific buttons at just the right moment in time. But



DEMO TAPE

EXPLORE THESE CLASSICS OF THE MUSIC GENRE ON THIS MONTH'S DEMO DISC.

FREQUENCY AND AMPLITUDE: Part simulated musical experience, part simulated pharmacological experience, these two related games pair relentless beat matching with a pupil-dilating light show. And if you're feeling creative, both games offer extensive remixing options.

GITAROO MAN: It looks like drawings from a high school notebook circa 1975 come to life, but it's a clever guitar-loving twist on the *PaRappa the Rapper* formula. *Gitaroo Man*'s cult hit status is legendary, and playing it has been scientifically proven to make you 10 to 20 percent cooler.

REZ: Stretching the bounds of what it means to be a "music game," this art-damaged oddity from the creator of *Lumines* is a 3D shooter (think *Panzer Dragoon*) you play like a drum machine. What really grabs you, though, is the game's modern/retro good looks.

FEATURING MUSIC FROM:
TKAST, SNOOP DOGG
N PAUL & FABOLOUS

MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 3: Hardly a game, this easy-to-use music creation software lets you do almost anything "professional" sampler/sequencer software can do. Create your own samples (from CDs or a microphone plugged in to the USB slot), and arrange them like musical Legos.

there's a big difference between a game like the turntable controller–equipped *Beatmania* and *Guitar Hero*. *Beatmania*, besides requiring an almost inhuman level of precision, plays its sound samples anytime and every time you hit a button. This means that if you can't hit the buttons at just the right time (because, say, you totally *suck*), the music sounds horrible, with wrong notes and wrong sounds played out of time. *Guitar Hero*, on the other hand, has a much more forgiving window of opportunity for matching the beat, and it only plays notes at the appropriate moment in the song. Part of the appeal of *Guitar Hero* is that you can't *not* rock.

"We've done games both ways," LoPiccolo says. "For *Guitar Hero*, we actually implemented it both ways, and for a while, you could switch back and forth between the two modes. But it just felt so much better to let people who aren't skilled musicians and don't have really good timing get the feel." It's a trade-off. We trade a certain amount of control for the swaggering feel of playing guitar like a rock god. This is part of the central tension in music games, the tug-of-war between making an entertaining game and giving players a taste of the free-flowing creativity that real music making is all about.

"Early on, our philosophy was very much, 'let's let people explore their musical selves in an open-ended way,'" LoPiccolo says. "We discovered that about 10 percent of the audience thinks that's just amazing, but everybody else is the type that isn't buying your game to be creative. They're buying your game to have a gaming experience." Most music games mix the military march of precision-timed button pressing with some element of creative input. *Beatmania* has short sections of free-for-all record scratching. *Frequency* and *Amplitude* let you tweak out with some interesting effects. And *Guitar Hero* has its whammy bar, a pitch-bending arm that lets you play around with the sound of sustained notes. Creatively, these features aren't a lot to work with, but they give you a way to personalize the music. It could be a peek into the possibilities of music gaming in the future.

"My personal ambition, and I think a lot of the ambitions of the senior design team here, is to place more and more creative control into the hands of the player," LoPiccolo says. "I would love to look toward a time, maybe 10 years from now, when the line between musical performance and gameplay is completely blurred. Like, if you're a good, experienced player in *Guitar Hero 6*, you're actually making music. You've learned a skill set through the gameplay that allows you to express yourself musically." Until then, though, you'll just have to deal with the inconvenience and blistered fingers of learning how to play a real guitar. | *Robert Ashley*

OPM'S BEST

Looking for the best of the best? Look no further. Below you'll find every game that was ever given a 5 out of 5 rating in *OPM*.

Game	Publisher	Issue
PS2		
Burnout 3: Takedown	EA Games	85
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FIFA Soccer 2004	EA Sports	75
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Madden NFL 2004	EA Sports	72
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SOCOM: U.S. Navy SEALs	Sony CEA	60
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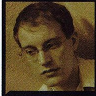
WWF SmackDown! 2: Know Your Role	THQ	40

SCORE 5|5

PS1-DERLAND

WELCOME BACK, LARA



By Jeremy Parish

When he's not trying to reclaim his vanished youth with obsolete games, Jeremy works as 1UP.com's features editor and charming mascot. Check out his blog at toastyfrog.1UP.com.

There's a new *Tomb Raider* game out this month—which, for the first time in ages, is actually kind of a big deal. It helps a lot that Eidos has finally realized that being able to say, "There's a new *Tomb Raider* game out this month," once or twice a year didn't do the franchise any favors. Lara Croft's three-year hiatus has given Crystal Dynamics enough time to do something with the series besides churn out more of the same on a creaky engine.

Good thing, too. *Tomb Raider* has fallen so far from grace that my friends sneer behind their hands at my frank admission that I'm looking forward to *Legend*. Come to think of it, the simple fact that I even have to describe my interest in the game as an "admission" probably says everything you need to know.

At this point, there's little question of how the *Tomb Raider* series fell from public favor; even folks at Eidos have gone on the record admitting they've been poor stewards of Toby Gard's creation. But what you may not understand is why anyone would even care about the game in the first place. Lara is most popular with nongamers these days—because, frankly, Angelina Jolie has done a much better job of making her cool than Eidos has. If you weren't around for the 3D revolution, it might be difficult to understand just what *Tomb Raider* meant for PlayStation owners back in the early days of the 32-bit era.

> LARA CROFT WAS INDIANA JONES WITH BREASTS.

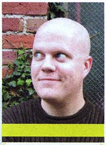
See, when the first *Tomb Raider* came around, there was nothing else like it. True 3D gaming was in its infancy, and early efforts like *Fade to Black* were more novel than playable. OK, so *Mario 64* beat Lara into stores by a matter of weeks. But even with Nintendo's main man hopping into polygonal splendor, *Tomb Raider* still stood apart. It wasn't a colorful, cartoonish action game, but rather a slow, thoughtful adventure through a predominantly brown world of underground labyrinths. The monochromatic color scheme didn't really matter much, though, because they were the most immersive shades of brown anyone had ever seen.

LucasArts probably choked on its own bile upon discovering that *Tomb Raider* "out-raidered" *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. A globe-trotting hero(ine) battling deadly wildlife, devious humans, and ultimately supernatural menaces, Lara Croft was Indiana Jones with ridiculously oversized breasts, and her quest was a mentally taxing journey through some of the most devious traps and challenges ever seen.

But most importantly, it was a *breathtaking* journey. The game's developer, Core, made full use of the freedom offered by 3D graphics to create massive tombs, caverns, and traps. The unexpected T-Rex cameo was shocking, but standing at the pinnacle of St. Francis' Folly and looking down a sheer drop through hundreds of feet of crisscrossing pathways was downright mind blowing. There was an incredible sense of presence to the crumbling ruins, and clever twists (like the lions who attacked when you crossed the floor of the Roman Colosseum) kept things interesting...and challenging.

Is *Tomb Raider: Legend* as groundbreaking as Lara's first adventure? Honestly, it can't be—nothing can. We'll probably never see another technological revolution like the jump from 2D to 3D. But I'm hoping *Legend* can rekindle that sense of wonder and immersion for me. If that proves to be the case, then Lara's return will be welcome indeed. |

IN MY DAY...



JOE RYBICKI welcomes your thoughts on the eternal debate over the power of videogames, violent or otherwise. Want to throw your two cents into the fray? Send your pithy comments to opm@ziffdavis.com.

MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

A few years back, I got a letter from my mom. Amid the pleasantries and family updates was this particularly touching passage:

"'Far be it from me to tell you what to do'...but I felt I *must* say something. I wish—I ask—I *plead* with you. Please try to do something to discourage those violent, antisocial videogames such as *Grand Theft Auto*. (I've read and heard more negative comments about this game in particular.)

"You have always cared about others—and cared deeply, I believe. I just can't believe that you don't care what effect these games have on other people—especially on kids and teens. I know you say they are for adults. Well, even if adults were the only ones to play them (and they aren't), the game can influence adults who are not emotionally and morally mature—and can even affect those who *are*. This sort of thing is depressing, at the very least, and we all ought to try to be uplifting and encouraging, and most of all, responsible. We *are* our brothers' keepers.

"You might think that you have no influence on the game designers, but I believe that you do. If you care, your voice could influence others to join you in protesting. And if you don't make a difference at this time, your attempts could bring a change in the future—so that *your* children might live in a more peaceful world."

WE KNOW VIDEOGAMES DON'T TURN US INTO BAT-WIELDING MANIACS.

Included in the letter was one of those alarmist news pieces we all remember from the days following *GTA3*'s smash success. You know what I'm talking about: Those sweaty, feverish shock pieces that seemed to invariably imply (if not claim outright) that the point of the game is—let's all say it together now—to pick up a hooker, then kill her and take your money back.

I always meant to write Mom back and explain that those of us who have played videogames all our lives know very well that they don't turn us into bat-wielding maniacs. I wanted to tell her about the therapeutic effects of releasing aggression in a harmless, virtual manner and direct her to some of the writings of MIT professor Henry Jenkins, who's made a living debunking the media's most sensational myths about games. But one thing led to another, the letter got filed away, and I just plain forgot.

It wasn't until I started doing this column that I remembered the letter. I was looking forward to printing it in this issue, inviting you folks to add your own comments—and also, you may notice, bringing *her* message to a much wider audience. (Look, I can't disobey my *mom*, OK?) I planned to open the issue to this page and send it to her, with a note saying, "See? I didn't forget."

But three weeks ago, with almost no warning, my mom died. And you know something? Of all the things I regret not being able to share with her, of all the missed opportunities, this is one of the biggest. Isn't that silly? I guess I feel like I disrespected her by not ever giving her a proper response.

So here you go, Mom: your answer at last. Sorry it's so late.

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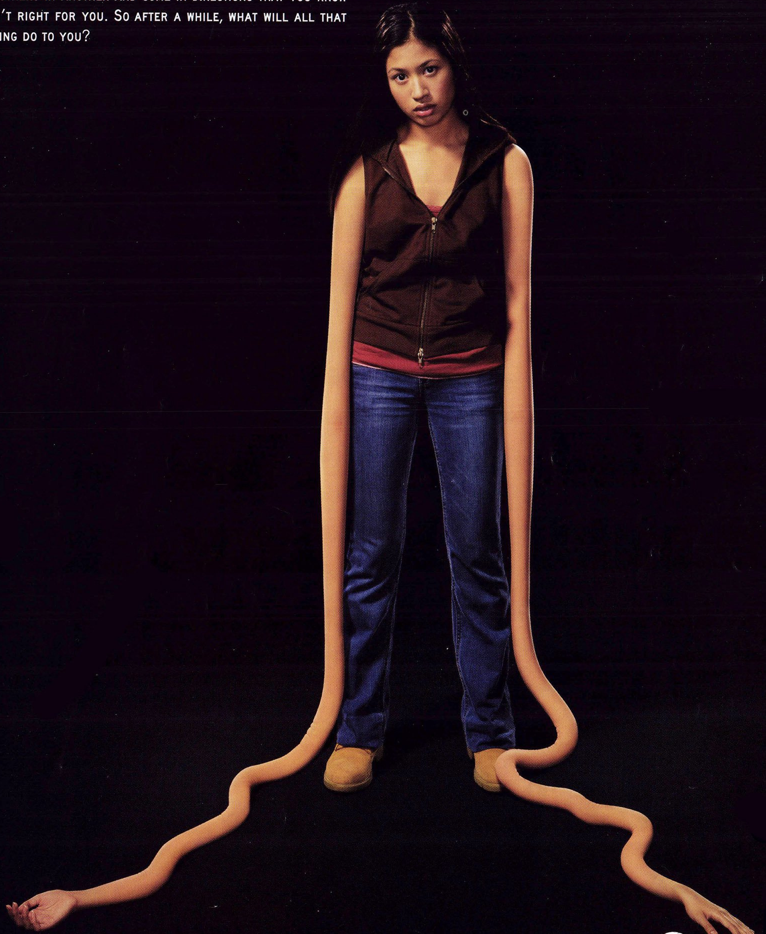
THEY'RE GONNA PULL ON YOU—SOME PEOPLE IN ONE DIRECTION, AND OTHERS IN ANOTHER AND SOME IN DIRECTIONS THAT YOU KNOW AREN'T RIGHT FOR YOU. SO AFTER A WHILE, WHAT WILL ALL THAT PULLING DO TO YOU?



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